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i have

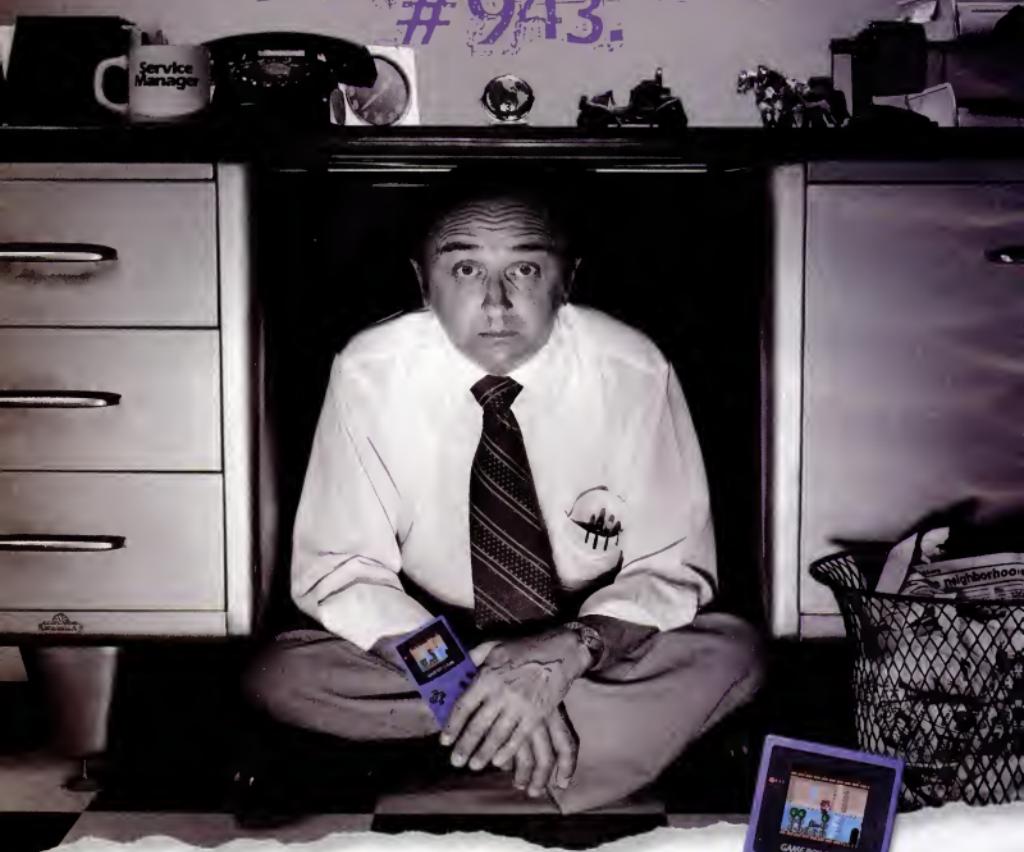
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ON THE COVER:

Dexter Holland of the Offspring photographed by Mark Alesky. Grooming by Kevin Ryan for Beauty & Photo. Styling by Dafne Balatos for Smashbox Beauty.

FEATURES

P.86 WHITE PUNKS ON OOP

In an era dominated by hip-hop and pop, the Offspring have become culture heroes by speaking to the least likely of disenfranchised classes: the unapologetically un-“Fify” white guy. Dexter Holland explains why his politically incorrect vision makes sense right now. **BY CHRIS NORRIS**

P.94 HOT-TUB ORGIES AND KUNG-FU BERTDOWNS

As much as beats and flow, the between-track skip defines hip-hop’s albumscape. From Prince Paul’s groundbreaking “Intro” on De La Soul’s *3 Feet High and Rising* to Lauryn Hill’s “lessons” on *Miseducation*, Spin provides a borderline Talmudic reading of hip-hop’s non-musical messages. **BY MIKE RUBIN AND CHARLES RAMON**

P.108 HOW PAUL WESTERBERG GOT HIS GROOVE BACK

Improbably and wonderfully, the legendary Replacements screw-up has produced a remarkable (and remarkably mature) album. **BY AJ SMITH**

P.104 FASHION: A MONTH IN MRUI PHOTOGRAPHS BY STEFAN RUITZ

P.114 THE LORDS OF DOGTOWN

Back in 1975—long before marketers even knew the word *extreme*—Tony Alva, Jay Adams, and the Santa Monica Z-boys began applying surf moves to concrete. Goofing off and having fun grinding L.A.’s drought-dry backyard pools, these middle-class kids became legends and (accidentally) invented skateboarding as we know it today. **BY G. BERTO**

P.122 CIRCUS OF THE DAMNED

Chicken John started Circus Rediculess because he couldn’t tell the difference between a punk show and a circus. But when his D.I.Y. collective of defiantly non-talent freaks hit the road for a three-week “dis-ass-tour,” they found that being perfectly bad—as opposed to just sucking—is an art in itself. **BY JEFF STRIK**

P.138 FASHION: TWO DAYS IN THE URRLY PHOTOGRAPHS BY LOUIS SANCHIS

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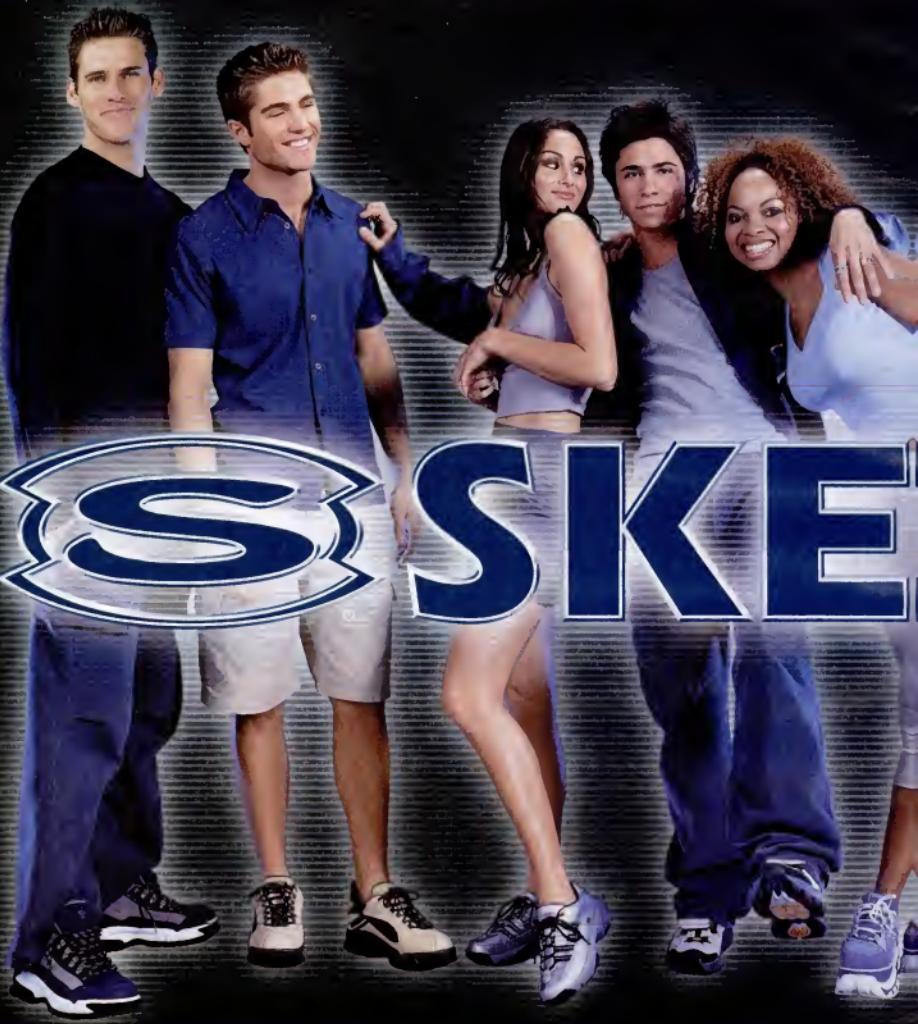
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Mau! style: Do not insert navel ring without professional supervision.
Photograph by Stefan Rutz.

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Bis buzz: You can help Amanda MacKinnon, Steven Clark, and John Clark share their deep love and respect for the '90s. Or you can just turn the page.

Photograph by Frederike Hehrig



COLUMNS

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PLUS: Busta may be paranoid, but they really are writing letters about him.

P.45 NOISE

Sleater-Kinney change their sound, cede no ground on the whole sell-out question. **BY JOSHUR CLOUER**

BACKSTAGE PASS: Giving till it hurts—Whitney Houston selflessly promotes herself for charity; LeAnn Rimes tries "Walkin' on the Sun"; and more.

BY JAMES PATRICK HERMAN

RIAA CRACKDOWN: Why your belief that the CD burner and the MP3 will herald a new, more democratic era in music is wrong, just wrong.

PLUS: Orgy: MTV's new animated hip-hop "tudefest; Fatboy Slim avoids his video close-up; TLC; fly video guy McG; in the studio with Chris Cornell; the Roots; Modern Rock radio's white noise; and nine new artists you need to know about.

P.61 EHDPOSURE

Bis; shooting shit up is fun for the whole family; Takashi Murakami's explosive anime; D.I.Y. athletic footwear; 7-Eleven's Spitz-O cup vs. Zoo, Duncan, Jack & Jane's Seima Blair; Cool Breeze; Chelsea Girl Jr. Gaby Hoffman; is that a bike in your pocket or are you just rarin' to go?; and the Spin 25.

P.77 POP LIFE

MOVIES: The rerelease of the Beatles' *A Hard Day's Night* reminds America what real fun feels like. **BY BOB ORVIS**

TELEVISION: 7th Heaven's clean-cut Camdens are the WB's ratings angels.

BY JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

BOOKS: Just as we all suspected, pretty counts. Nancy Etcoff's *Survival of the Prettiest* debunks *The Beauty Myth* myth. **BY KIM FRANCE**

PLUS: Our monthly culture roundup. And The Mix.

P.139 REVIEWS

Beth Orton and Ani DiFranco **BY JOSHUR CLOUER**; Built to Spill; Sleater-Kinney; Prince Paul; the Roots; Ice; Sparklehorse; Sebadoh; Source Direct; Imperial Teen. **THE SHREDDERS:** Duran Duran; Gang of Four; Galaxy 500; XTC; Shaniac; Fun Lovin' Criminals; Kelly Willis; 4 Hero; Sam Prekop; Mojave 3; and more.

BY JOSHUR CLOUER

SINGLES: A Tribe Called Quest vs. Aphrodite; Hole; Mr. Dibbs; New Radicals; the Offspring; Paperclick People; the Promise Ring; the New Rising Sons **BY CHARLES BRONSON**

LABEL PROFILE: Vinyl Communications has got a nice techno hardcore sound, but you can't dance to it...and they don't care. **BY DOUGLAS WALK**

P.152 GENIUS LESSONS

In praise of steamy Sappho love. **BY SERIN LANDERS**

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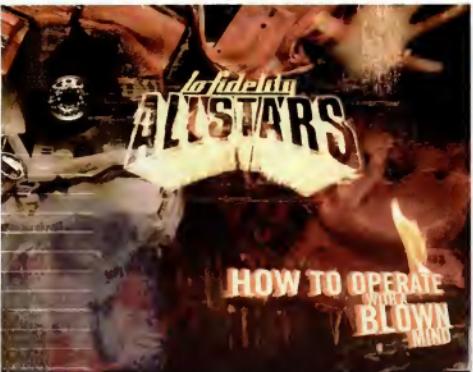


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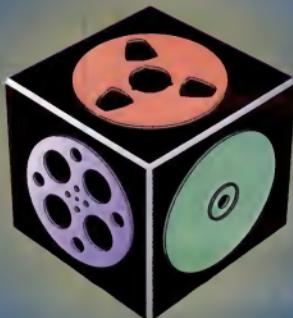
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"The Lords of Dogtown," page 114

Quote: "I was inspired by the old skaters like Tony Alva, who's 41 and still skates every day. I bought a skateboard. I went into this shop in Santa Monica and found the same kind of board I had as a kid."

Has Written for: *Wired*, *Newsday*

Quirky Frightening Tidbit: Porn star Ron Jeremy asked Beato to write his life story.



JEFF STARK

"Circus of the Damned," page 122

Quote: "After a couple of days of hanging out with this circus, you start to think that it's a really normal thing to be in a parking lot in Waco with Chuckles doing back-bends and Justie covered in grease setting up a card table for dinner. It takes some redneck going by in a pickup truck at five miles per hour to jar you back into reality."

Has Written for: *Salon*, *Home Equity News* ("the low point of my career")



STEFAN RUIZ

"A Month in Maui," page 104

Quote: "Working in Hawaii was the best way that I could have spent Christmas."

Has Shot for: *i-D*, *Arena*, *Colors*

Fun Trivia: For the past seven years, Ruiz has taught drawing and painting to inmates at California's San Quentin prison.



MARK ALESKY

"White Punks on Dope," page 86

Quote: "I took [the Offspring] out of their really young persons. Two or three of them are married, and they're all in their 30s. They're really a polite band."

Has Shot for: *The Face*, *Dazed & Confused*, *i-D Upcoming*: A series of short fashion films available on the Internet



JAMES PATRICK HERMAN

"Backstage Pass," page 59

Quote: "Since I've been writing this column, the absolute height of glamour was when Lil' Kim's cocker spaniel peed on my arm at Puffy's 4th of July barbecue in the Hamptons. The dog was far too cute toirk me, though." Day Job: Music editor at *Elle* Upcoming: *God Is a DJ: The Life and Times of Junior Vasquez* (Pocket Books), out later this year



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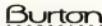
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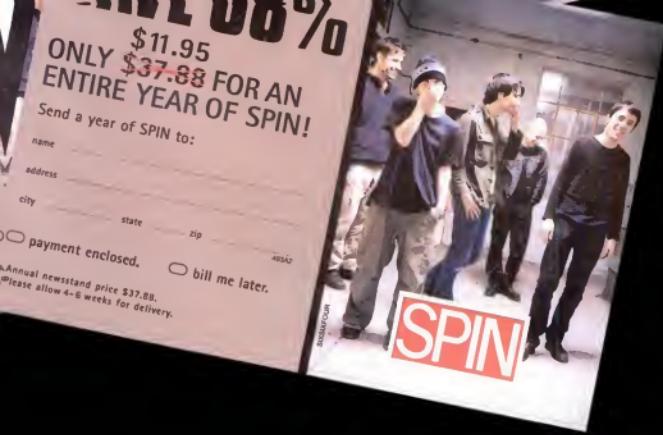


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Come, Armageddon, Come

I want to commend you on the Busta Rhymes article [cover, December]. The pictures are fantastic and the story is well-written. Busta is definitely one of the best rap artists in today's music industry.

*Joe Bell
Laurelton, New York*

I'm a huge Busta Rhymes fan despite the fact he feels he has to play the "racial superiority" card. Personally, I could care less about his views regarding white people. But can someone please tell me why white people are held to a higher standard than black people regarding race relations? If Eddie Vedder were to say that it's not in the nature of black people to be godlike, he would be ostracized by the entertainment community. What's the dilly, Busta?

*Derek L. McDaniel
Baton Rouge, Louisiana*

Busta Rhymes and Method Man in one issue? In the words of Dave Wyndorf of Monster Magnet, "It's time to put on a pair of leather pants and breathe fire on people!" Rock is not dead, people. How about making a full-on dev-horn-in-the-air screw-everybody-I'm-gonna-burn-your-eyeballs-right-out-of-your-head magazine?

*David Hunt
Concord, New Hampshire*

Foolish Games (Are Tearing Us Apart)

I'm not a videogame player, so I haven't heard of most of the games in your article

"Gaming '98" [December]; nevertheless, it is a pleasant change to read an article that seems to enjoy life. Spin's attitude toward games is positive instead of your more typical stance toward a subject: that what you are writing about was "cool long before cool was cool and now that you at Spin have exposed uncold youth to this, it is no longer cool." Not all of your readers are eyeliner-clad depressed teens who dislike anything that isn't completely obscure or "indie."

*Jeff Gustafson
Moorhead, Minnesota*

"Gaming '98" (a thinly veiled advertisement) could have been juxtaposed with an exploration of how computer gaming isolates and detaches the heavy user from real life, and in some instances causes them to be desensitized toward violence. Is it that you don't want to trouble the game companies that are laying down the big buck?

*Mark Jerome
San Francisco, California*

Sprechen Sie Sassy?

What are these emigres of table scraps ("NU Noise for Boyz," "Live, December") that you seem to consider coverage of Rammstein? As much as I can tell, they are the story. It's not like any other songs or bands have hit the music scene practically yelling "Achtung, Bitch!" in another language. They are a phenom! Perhaps, you lack a German-speaking reporter. If

that's the case, you can send me next time Lynette Renee Jensen Salem, Ohio

Chuck Eddy's article "NU Noise for Boyz" is an insult and a testament to pre-judge toward hard-rock listeners. I attended the Family Values Tour and—surprise!—I was one of hundreds of females who Eddy says were not there. He calls attention to the "young-aggressors-with-penis" and the lack of "gals" in the mosh pit. Perhaps most females don't want to get the shit kicked out of them? Using cynical and condescending phrases such as "dudes in baggy shorts," "fueled by years of oppression,"

Jonathon Davis' "bagpipe solo was a cute touch." Eddy is plainly making a mockery of everyone. My friends and I are not, and never have been, oppressed by "high-school shop teachers," and not all our parents thrive of spiteful teenage angst and rebellion. It's obvious Eddy deeply believes in stereotypes by the way he describes a scene in which kids were just having fun. It is bizarre and hypocritical that in your November issue you rave about how Korn has striven and struggled through the business and then you decide to send a closed-minded, prejudiced geezer to bash what he cannot hope to comprehend: heavy music and what it's like to be young.

*Megan Fitzgerald
Utica, New York*

Elvis Was a Hero to Most

I am a postal worker in real life so maybe you ought to print this. Your article on Elvis vs. Alanis ("Building a New Rock Myth," Noise, December) is nothing more than a weak attempt to bash Elvis. As if putting these two names together isn't enough of

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We Want to Give It to You, Baby (Uh Huh, Uh Huh) Peep Chris Norrie's Offspring cover story (page 88) and then peep SPINonline for your chance to win official band schwag. The first ten of our peeps to e-mail SPINonline@aol.com the name of the band and song sampled in the intro of "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)" automatically wins. Our motto: "SPINonline—doing it for our peeps."

Calling Dr. Love Forlorn? Depressed? Homy? Spin's self-proclaimed jerk, Genius Lessons cartoonist Sean Landers, has agreed to give you horrendously bad advice to exacerbate the difficult period known as Valentine's Day. E-mail your traumas to LandersLuv@aol.com. Questions and answers will be posted on SPINonline's spicy Valentine's page.

February: Transcribing Is Fun Month!

Because we have a butt-load of interviews we haven't transcribed yet, SPINonline is officially declaring February "Transcribing Is Fun Month" to motivate our sorry-as-a-procrastinating selves. Log on throughout February for Q&As with Ben Folds, Dr. Israel, Fun Lovin' Criminals, Archers of Loaf, the Stooges' Ron Asheton, and oh so many more.

Sound-Off KinderVamp@aol.com, in response to our SPINdex on image makeovers, made us feel shallow and cheap. "If you're more concerned with how [bands] look and less about what they sound like, then you're not a music fan; you're a fashion fan." Hey, Kinder, pipe down with your sanctimonious rant; we're trying to watch El's Fashion File.

SPINdex To be honest, February is not really "Transcribing Is Fun Month"; it's actually the "Lovers' Month," as SPINonline wants to know who your favorite rock star couples are—and why Kim and Thurston? Whitney and Bobby? Damon and Justine? Gavin and Gwen? Captain and Tennille? Follow your heart and e-mail its secrets to Spintronic@aol.com.



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an insult to Elvis's memory, the article contains nothing but potshots and misinformation in order to manipulate facts into a "clever" mold. You cite '64 as the year Elvis began making forgettable songs. While he did record more than his share of movie soundtracks, not every song was a piece of crap. You also overlook the great non-

film studio material recorded throughout the '60s. In '68, Elvis made a return to public performance in what many consider to be the peak of his musical career. All you have to say is "excess wearing of leather." About the Vegas shows in 1969, you say they "max out at 45 minutes." Joshua Clover, are you even old enough to have

attended these shows? Those shows ran 75 minutes on average, seldom less than an hour and some lasting almost 90 minutes. No mention whatsoever was made of the classic Memphis session of '69, which yielded numerous gold and platinum albums and singles. What a shame. The year 1970 was one of Elvis's busiest and

most triumphant years, including two sold-out Vegas stands, two tours, a documentary, several more gold records, and an award from the Jaycees for being one of the Ten Most Outstanding Young Men in America, and you choose to mention his Department of Justice badge from Nixon, which again has no bearing on career milestones or accomplishments. How does getting fat equal self-parody? It happens to a lot of us as we age. I hear a lot of people say Elvis was a rebel in his younger days but mellowed out in the later years as he identified with the establishment. Bullshit. Elvis always did what he wanted to do, what he felt good doing, with the exception of the movies, which his greedy little dollar-swiping manager lied him up in before he knew what was happening.

Jack Mullins
Suffern, New York

If you want to talk authenticity, talk Tori Amos. Going from Y Kant Tori Read to the integrity-filled genius she is today makes Alanis' rise from crap to credibility look like nothing.

Stacy Sandow
Lombard, Illinois

Alanis Morissette isn't the first pop success story from the Great White North (see Neil, Joni, BTO, etc.), and she certainly won't be the last. As for her "cred,"

READER STATS:

Breakdown of this month's letters...

Addressed to Sean Landers with dirty dollar bills stuffed inside	7%
Suggesting fans review concerts and CDs in place of bitter geezer <i>Spin</i> curmudgeons	35%
Disgusted with the work of Chuck Eddy to the point of making fun of his name	7%
From brave souls whose P.S. includes some form of "I hate the Beastie Boys"	3%
Correctly using Readers Poll New Cool Slang Word category winner, "tight"	2%
Using colloquialisms "pseudo-intellectual," "get over yourselves," or "wake the fuck up"	21%
Soliciting job after issuing bile-soaked rant	2%
Noting first and foremost that writing a letter to a magazine is a waste of time	23%
Insensitively informing <i>Spin</i> that their subscriptions are solely to read Genius Lessons	1%
Asserting that intelligence is a prerequisite to understanding the beliefs of Marilyn Manson	3%
From our Canadian neighbors who didn't write "eh" or "hoser" or reference hockey	1%
Taking offense at the presence of the names "Alanis" and "Elvis" on same page	10%
Breaking down <i>Spin</i> 's editorial into a simple mathematical equation	5%
Equating reading <i>Spin</i> to listening to Matt Pinfield for three hours	15%
Outing Korn as "the REO Speedwagon of the new millennium"	1%
Miscounting the number of ad pages before the Going Postal section (actually 45%)	65%
From actual postal workers	1%

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it is the most perfected bit of media-constructed cool we've seen in some time. *Tom Laskin*
Madison, Wisconsin

Art or Noise

It's no secret that Crispin Glover ("Crispin Glover, Enemy of Snails," December) is the world's biggest nut-job, so why does *Spin* feel the need to make him out to be some kind of genius? Hey, if I rounded up a bunch of people with Down Syndrome and spent the next couple of years filming them while they screwed around with snails and walkie-talkies, I wouldn't be branded a genius; the men in white coats would come and take me away—for good.

Brian Siegel
Virginia Beach, Virginia

1.8.7 on an Undercover Cock

It's about time you guys covered some American drum 'n' bass ("Transgender Express," Noise, December) even if your piece was about 1.8.7's sex change. Actually Greg Milner's story doesn't say shit about what's really going on here. *Spin*, just like all the other rags, seems to have its head so far up England's ass it forgets to look around locally. Check out the New York scene with the Liquid Sky crew, Breakbeat Science, Jungle Nation, and Konkrete Jungle and maybe then

you'll have a story on the music. *Andrew Graham*
Somerville, Massachusetts

Your piece on American junglist 1.8.7 is quite disappointing. You hardly touch on the music. The point is we (the jungle scene) could care less about her sexuality. 1.8.7 is one of the deepest jungle producers. End of story. *Doug Merritt*
Bloomfield, New Jersey

Alanis: Not a 13-Year-Old Pervert!

In his review of Alanis Morissette's new album, *Supposed Former Infatuation Junkie* (Reviews, December), Chuck Eddy makes her sound like a crazy-ass 13-year-old pervert, which wouldn't be bad if that's what she is—but she's a grown woman, dammit! *Kelly Borland*
Arkadelphia, Arkansas

Jumping Someone Else's Train
If Tony Kanal [No Doubt bassist] in all actuality believes what he says in the "Noise" section [November] about the band's new album evoking the feel of the Cure in their glory days, that guy has another thing coming. There is no way No Doubt can ever come close to creating music that could even touch what the

Cure has done. So that guy should deflate his ego a bit...or creates a new sound without biting someone else's. *Amy Kenny*
St. Thomas, Ontario, Canada

Say, Hep Daddy-O, Don't Blow Your Wig—Collar Some Jake Trickeration on the Flip Side

While I wish the Royal Crown Revue ["When Swing Really Swung," Noise, December] every success and have no wish to be seen as a detractor of the band (whom I enjoy very much), I have to take exception with guitarist James Achor's comment on the band's influence since its inception in 1989: "Today bands have an M.O.: Three horns, guitar player, upright bass, drummer, and singer. If nothing else, we've been the blueprint for that." Actually, Roomful of Blues [Rounder Records] has been playing loosely in this style for near on 30 years, usually with an extra horn or two, plus a pianist. These guys were doing it right, too. *Steve Burton*
Rounder and Bullseye Blues & Jazz
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Less Than Psycho

I am pleased to read something positive about Bret Easton Ellis's writing ("He Came from the '80s," Books, December)

and his new book, *Glamorama* (which I haven't read yet). I live in New York City and, from time to time, have seen Ellis out at night. Each time he was alone. He seems very pensive, almost brooding. He wasn't dressed in black; and he wasn't sniffing from coke or whining into a cellular phone. Nor was he dripping in blood from the body he left in pieces back in his posh loft. He wasn't even Andrew McCarthy playing a Brett Ellis alter ego. He was just a guy. Since the media have made him out to be such a boogeyman, his lack of flamboyance is startling. Perhaps Ellis has taken a bad rap because people don't separate the writer from his myth or from his art. Or perhaps it's because they need to see the so-called rich kid taken down. Both *Less Than Zero* and *The Rules of Attraction* were engaging and imaginative works of fiction. Thank you for not taking the road most often traveled; it takes courage to be objective about such an easy target. Now how about an item on Tama Janowitz (only kidding).

Martin Dreher
New York, New York

One Dollar Bill, Y'all

Sean Landers, nothing would please me more than to be able to send you a crisp dollar bill [Genius Lessons, December]. Unfortunately, I am in prison and money is not allowed. I could send you three stamps

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(prisoners' monetary equivalent), but that would leave me short. You see, I've just applied one of your staple ideals—greed. I wish you would dispense with your boring threats of discontinuing your page and get on with the show. Tell me what a worthless bag of shit I am for being in prison. Tell the world why men will screw fat chicks but not be seen with them. You're the stuffing on my plate, Sean Landers. So quit your feeble attempts to worm your way out of the kitchen. Pick up your pen and get to work, you loser.

Joe Smith
Carson City, Nevada

I could give a shit less if Marilyn Manson got a sex change or if Sheryl Crow released a new album. All I look forward to every month is knowing that Sean Landers is pissed off at the world. That's worth a dollar.

Erin Bonso
St. Louis, Missouri

Readers Who Need Readers

I must compliment my fellow *Spin* readers for their thoroughly enjoyable and, dare I say, thoughtfully crafted contributions [Going Postal]. Our letters debunk the myth that we are apathetic, lazy, and downright wishy-washy when it comes to an opinion on the current state of affairs, and cannot concentrate on or comprehend a concept for more than 15 seconds even if it's on MTV! So, readers, pump up your shoulders and throw out your chests and get ready to inflict grave bodily harm on *Spin*'s editorial staff for using enough poison ink to stain the *Titanic* in what you see as a flogging of your favorite band (who probably really does suck); call for the cstration of Tony Stoshok; for hisphony, bitter hatred directed toward everyone not like him; and protest for the dismemberment of Sean Landers for his poorly crafted sarcasm and pointless stories!

Michael J. LoPresti
New York, New York

In response to the "Disgruntled Employee of the Month" letter [Going Postal, December], I'd just like to say I'd wear pink bunny ears on my schlong and speak in Yiddish even if Ad-Rock didn't decide to do so.

Sean Graves
Seattle, Washington

Write Going Postal, *Spin*, 205 Lexington Ave., New York, NY 10016, or e-mail spinonline@so.com. Always include your full name and phone number for verification. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

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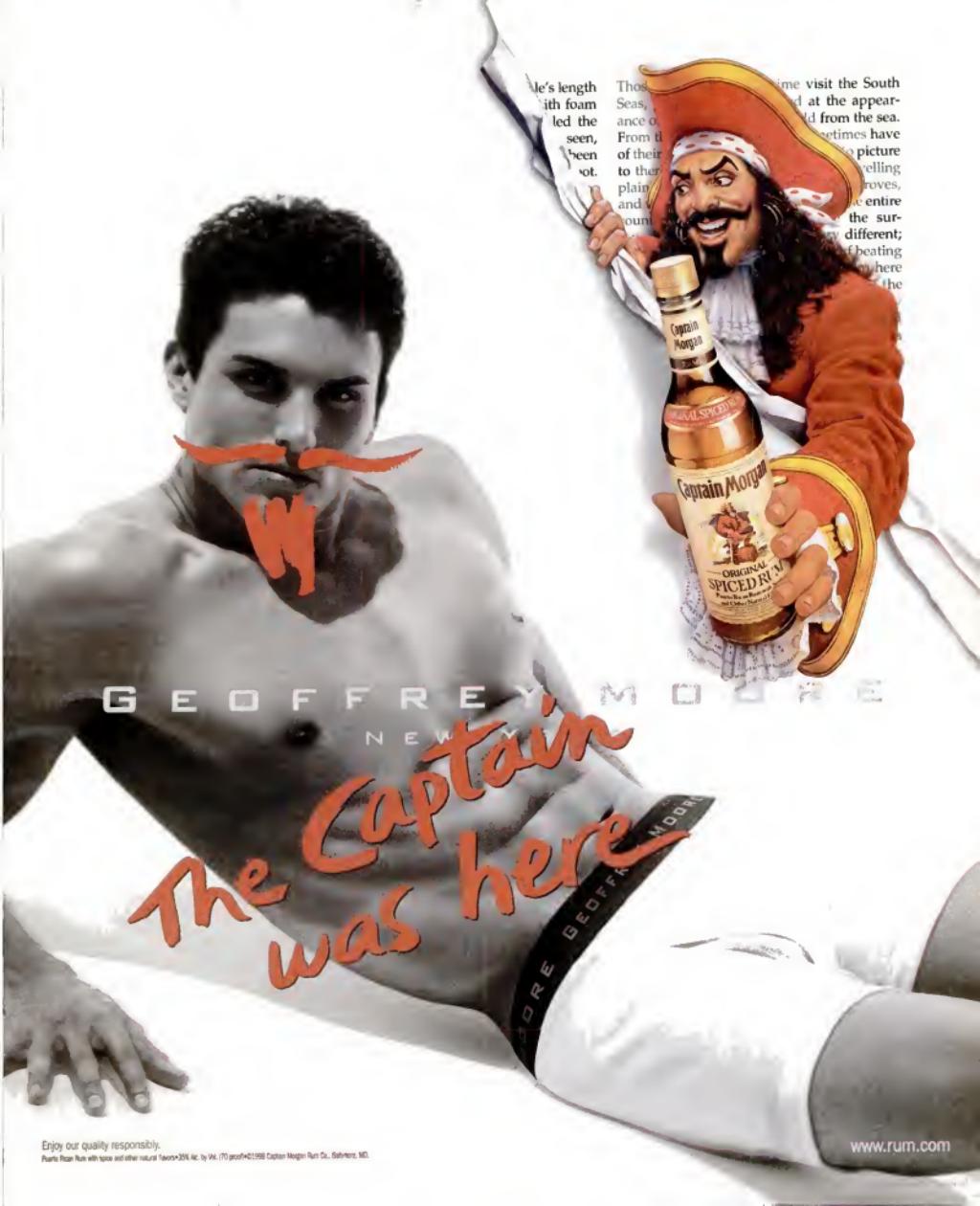
I really don't understand why you have to provide a forum for paranoid artists such as Busta Rhymes (and Canibus and Method Man) to talk about Armageddon when it's so obvious they're completely stoned and talking shit out of their asses. Hello? Marijuana makes people paranoid and delusional. I thought this was *Spin*, not *High Times* or some Heaven's Gate. "Here come the space ships, let's go" leaflet you find on the subway. Get real. Sounds to me like you're willfully printing the startling predictions and fears (Five Percent mathematics, "stock market crash," "computer virus," "no democratic system after this term," "what if the world blew up right under my foot on the way to the weed apt") of a severely stoned person who may alienate young kids and people like me who aren't blunted or—worse—start some kind of panic. Is Busta informed? Is he psychic? No, he's stoned, and, for better or worse, *Spin* is like, let's turn on the tape recorder and see what the funny, kooky stoned guy in the dress says. I'm not dissing Busta, really—I mean, I like his videos on MTV. But don't you think there's already enough going on in the world for artlets of Busta's stature and megazinea of *Spin*'s stature to address. At least Jewel talks about shit like the present and does something about it. (She just started some charity with her mom). Damn, I know Jesse Ventura's a governor and all but don't you think it's time we stop giving stoned weirdos the podium and just be normal?

Not trying to hear the voice of doom,

Jennifer McNaffee
Akron, Ohio

Larry "Ratso" Sloman, former editor-in-chief of *High Times* and author of *Reefer Madness: A History of Marijuana* (*St. Martin's Press*) responds:

How dare Ms. McNaffee impute that *High Times* is a haven for paranoid and delusional ideation. Jennifer, beware the Ides of March. Beware the semblance of normalcy: If you dare to look beneath the surface of things, you'll eventually see that all seemingly random historical events are, in fact, being directed by 23 elders who live in the Himalayas and channel their insights through people like Busta.



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NOISE



Staying free: from left, Janet Weiss, Carrie Brownstein, and Corin Tucker.

PUNK PLANET

Stalwart indie trio Sleater-Kinney remain true to their label credo: Kill Rock Stars

Sleater-Kinney, alt-America's most beloved trio of punk-punish furies, are sitting in a coffee shop/bookstore in their semi-hometown of Portland, Oregon, discussing the problem of bigness. They've just completed their follow-up record to 1997's heart-stopping *Dig Me Out*. But they've stuck with aptly named stalwart indie label Kill Rock Stars, while their onetime labelmates Elliott Smith and Mary Lou Lord have headed off to try to be rock stars in the potentially greener pastures of DreamWorks and Sony. "We have a vision for ourselves," maintains singer/guitarist Carrie Brownstein, an unwavering believer in the freedoms that indie provides. "Whether it's exactly the vision of

the other artists on Kill Rock Stars...obviously it's not."

The very image of a band that prefers not to have an image at all, Sleater-Kinney are about to unleash their fourth album, *The Hot Rock*, onto a music scene where image increasingly counts for everything. Which brings up the following quandary: How do you rock in the free world when the indie movement is in a coma and five musical mega-corporations own everything? In some ways, Sleater-Kinney, which also includes singer/guitarist Corin Tucker and drummer Janet Weiss, are like Al Green perfecting soul music a decade after it stopped mattering. They're a punk-rockin' straight-talkin' 'not act. But for most of

pg.45...SLEATER-KINNEY:
NEW ALBUM IS THE HOT ROCK

pg.46...ORGY RIRE TOTALLY
RIWESOME '80S

pg.49...STATION ZERO:
MTV'S NEW DIS-FEST
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NEW ARTISTS

pg.52...TLC: THREE SIDES TO
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pg.54...THE ROOTS' BIG
STATEMENT
WIGGR RADIO IN FLORIDA
STUDIO TIME: CHRIS CORNELL

pg.56...CO BOOTLEGGERS US:
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pg.59...MICROGENIE ALERT:
BLIP-HOPI
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SMASH MOUTH, GREG GULLI

Men who love hair get from left, Amir Derakh, Jay Gordon, Ryan Shuck, Paige Haley, and Bobby Hewitt.

(continued) America the riot is over.

Not that the band cares. When Sleater-Kinney's breakthrough album, *Dig Me Out*, topped many national year-end music polls alongside big-budget critical heavyweights Radiohead and Bob Dylan, the band had a classically contrarian response: change direction. "I wanted to challenge why people liked *Dig Me Out*," says Brownstein. "It's not a successful record if there's no disagreement there."

The Hot Rock challenges by being "a little bit graceful and beautiful and complicated," as Brownstein puts it. Removing the chain-saw drive for a prettier motor sometimes leaves the album idling; and not all parties handled the shift so philosophically. For Tucker, moving from blitzkrieg bop to a sweater sound was scary. "I had a lot of anxiety about it. I had a lot of self-image tied up in really distorted guitars and putting up this front of anger. The band really blocked it out, but I freaked."

Those freak-outs aren't necessarily bad. Sleater-Kinney pull power from playing out the musical and personal tension between Tucker and Brownstein, the two leads, who were briefly a couple. Adding to the intricate calculus is the fact that Tucker and Weiss live in Portland, and Brownstein lives in Olympia, Washington. Weiss, who knows from band complications (her other band, Quasi, features ex-husband Sam Coomes), has appointed herself mediator. "Sometimes I ground it," she says. "Sometimes I play with it."

When the band takes the stage and gets all epic, with Tucker unleashing her massive voice and Brown-

"I HAD A LOT OF SELF-IMAGE TIED UP IN REALLY DISTORTED GUITARS AND PUTTING UP THIS FRONT OF ANGRINESS." SAYS TUCKER.



stein kicking out the jams (and sometimes the mic stand), it seems as if these women may be able to make the indie dream wake again. Even if the dream changes. "I wanna be able to sit inside the songs a bit more and not be tossed about by them," says Brownstein. "You can have power without force. You can have power and beauty." JOSHUA CLOVER

To get the skinny on Sleater-Kinney's favorite parts of the Robert Redford film *The Hot Rock*, log on to *SPINonline*.



JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH

Orgy are, like, totally awesome '80s

As the first signees to neo-thrashmasters Korn's Elementree Records, Los Angeles quintet Orgy spent last summer performing for post-hester metalheads on the Family Values Tour. But a close inspection of the band's debut disc, *Candyass*, reveals roots that go far deeper than Korn's twisted dreads. Check out the eerie keyboard squiggles, Jay Gordon's disaffected British-sounding vocals, and—what's this?—an aggro-fied-for-the-'90s cover of New Order's mope-dance classic "Blue Monday." Could those lead-footed drumbeats actually be the thumping of a New Wave heart? As the following checklist confirms, the '80s may smell funny, but Orgy love them anyway. TIM KENNEALLY

Flashy, androgynous image?

Yup. Fashion plates all, Orgy accessorize their Gucci-meets-Goodwill togs with Goth-inspired coifs. (Bassist Paige Haley crafts his own jet-black, Robert Smithian friggin' wig.) Also essential: well-stocked makeup kits packed with Urban Decay and MAC cosmetics. "Girls trip out over all the shit we have," says guitarist Amir Derakh. Average pre-show prep time: one hour. "Sometimes it's faster if we're running late," says Haley.

Do they blind you with science?

Check. Derakh favors guitar synths, an instrument that went out of vogue in 1985 along with muscle shirts emblazoned with Japanese characters. "I've got just about every [synth] ever made," the proud gearhead says. Drummer Bobby Hewitt further solidifies the robo-pop aesthetic with his electronic Roland "V" drums. Terry Bozzio, anyone?

Can they dance if they want to?

You betcha. Orgy's "Blue Monday" has already been subjected to multiple dance remixes. "We don't really strive to be dance-friendly," says former club DJ Derakh, "but that's definitely there. Dead or Alive is one of my favorite bands ever."

Do they want your sex?

Woof, woof. Heirlooming back to more carefree, pre-epidemic days, Orgy whip out their healthy libidos at strip clubs across America. "We went to this gentleman's club in Reno," recalls Haley. "Ryan [Shuck, guitarist] thought he was throwing one-dollar bills onstage, but they were actually hundreds." And back home, Hewitt is married to adult-film star Shane.

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Hey, hey, hey: It's the crew from *Station Zero*.

types—there's Chino, who's got only love for the underground; Puffy-loving hustla Karaz; uber-nerd Scooter, the B-boy brains behind the operation; and DJ Tech, who uses the wheels of steel to get satirical. Despite some similarities, don't mention Beavis and Butt-head to *Station Zero*'s architects. "We did not have them in mind," snaps creator/producer Carito Rodriguez.

Abby Terkuhl, head of MTV Animation, says the new show is as high a priority for the network as its predecessor was in 1993. But can an MTV show that dismisses its most heavily rotated artists survive it, say, Puffy doesn't think it's exactly hilarious to see himself ridiculed for the spur boots he wears in the "Born Around the World" video? "There's always going to be flak," says series co-creator/producer Barry Bookhard, who also runs a marketing company called Avenue B. "But we represent all points of view. If Chino dismisses something, chances are Karaz is going to defend it."

Indeed, *Station Zero* delves deep into the hip-hop community. Rodriguez and his partner Tramp (who together run C-Traze Inc., a hip-hop album-cover design company) are basing the show on their comic strip "View From the Underground," which ran from 1991 to '94 in the Source, where Rodriguez currently serves as music editor. "As hip-hop hits the mainstream, I've seen the culture ungodly misrepresented," he says. "We took *Station Zero* to MTV so that the guys who live this life might have more say about how we come across on-screen. Who better to make fun of me than me?" MATT DIEHL.

STATION ZERO

A new animated MTV show is a familiar dis-fest, this time for the hip-hop nation

You thought they were gone, but Beavis and Butt-head are back by popular demand. Or are they black by popular demand? *Station Zero*, an animated show set to begin airing on MTV in March, seemingly updates MTV's metalhead duo for the hip-hop era, evoking music television's more irreverent heyday. (A Jennifer Lopez cameo in a Puffy video is heckled thus: "Isn't that Selena? I thought she was dead.") Concealed as a fictional low-rent cable access show devoted to salting popular rap videos, *Station Zero* features four characters drawn with hip-hop archetypes—their names are Chino, Karaz, Scooter, and DJ Tech, who also uses the wheels of steel to get satirical. Despite some similarities, don't mention Beavis and Butt-head to *Station Zero*'s architects. "We did not have them in mind," snaps creator/producer Carito Rodriguez.

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Cool Video Alert

Fatboy Slim's "Praise You"

Really, truly bad art can be a wonderful thing. Consider Spike Jonze and Roman Coppola's latest video for Norman Cook, a.k.a. Fatboy Slim. Posing as the leader of a dubious "Terrance Community Dance Group," Jonze and his troupe guerrilla-stage a full-blown interpretive dance to Cook's "Praise You" outside a Los Angeles movie theater. Shot in a single take, the video is a real-time record of their painfully earnest performance, complete with interruption by a not-amused theater manager. While the troupe's hyper-chaosy choreography (think fish, birds, Ed Grimley) is hilarious, the real treat lies in spotting the frozen, "this is a joke, right... Right?" smiles in the surrounding audience. Less-perceptive viewers, on seeing the purposely low-grade film and homemade-looking title screen, may well think they've stumbled onto the world's worst cable access show. "I don't like being in videos. I'm not handsome, and I'm not an actor," says Cook, who nonetheless makes a brief cameo, as he does in all his videos. "So I loved Spike's idea as a way to keep me off-camera. Plus, it keeps me from being hassled on the streets." CHRIS HARRIS



INCOMING

New artists: the good, the bad, the soon-to-be unavoidable

1-F **Fine Against the View** (Elektra) Known for stints in soaps and rehab, and a brief marriage to Shannen Doherty, Ashley Hamilton (son of actor George) tries fronting a rock band with help from his musical enabler Scott Weiland. Who could the line "She's a wrecking ball" be about?

1-B **Rob Swift The Abelist** (Asphodel) On his second solo album, this New York turntablist (and member of the X-ecutioners) backdrops his mind-boggling two-Technics wizardry with a live band and rapping. Hopeful song title: "All That Scratching Is Making Me Rich."

1-C **Tommy Henriksen** (Capitol) This Long Island-bred pop-rocker does a near-perfect imitation of Psychedelic Furs frontman Richard Butler on a debut clearly created by a kid convinced that the '80s was the best time for rock music ever.

2-R **Mucho Macho** (The Limehouse Link) Baggans Banquet Like Fatboy Slim and Monkey Mafia, this London DJ duo hosts a popular club night ("Monk on Fire" at The Clinic). And their electro-funk debut is equally ruled by dumb-fun breakbeats and general goofiness.

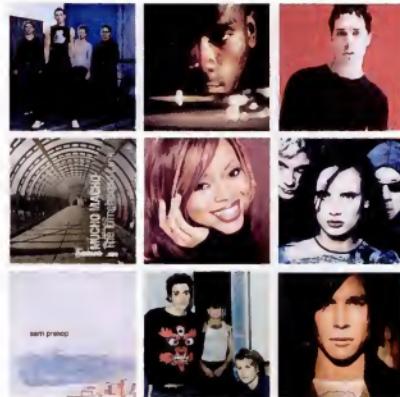
2-B **Shanice Shanice** (LaFace) Yet another one-named R&B diva, this former Babyface backup singer, who busted out in '91 with the hit single "I Love Your Smile," is back with a grown-up collection of slow jams and Missy Elliott-style uptempo workouts.

2-C **Book & Candle** *Read My Sign* (Blackbird) Yes, they're German, and no, they're not dancing Sprockets. Vocalista Jana Gross takes her cues from the Cranberries, but the band's daffy lyrics sound like they were translated by someone who doesn't speak English either.

3-R **Sam Prekop** *Sam Prekop* (Thrill Jockey) His band the Sea and Cake have a reputation for being experimental, but Prekop goes for brazy lounge-pop on a solo album perfect for cardigan-clad hipsters and their bespectacled girlfriends.

3-B **Marvelous 3** *Hey! Album* (HF/Elektra) This glammy Atlanta trio has three elements necessary in the race for modern-rock radio success: A snappily titled single ("Freak of the Week"), a grab-bag full of Cheap Trick riffs, and enough eyelineer to service a fleet of Gothas.

3-C **Gus Wurd** *Word of Mouth Parade* (Almo Sounds) Having passed up the chance to front Blind Melon after Shannon Hoon died, Gus makes his play with sunny '70s-lovin' pop à la David Cassidy. It's not hard to imagine him crashing Lilith Fair and telling everyone to loosen up. TRACY PEPPER



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THREE THE HARD WAY

Everything you wanted to know about TLC but were *really* afraid to ask

Bankruptcy, illness, and Arson probably wasn't seriously considered as a title for TLC's third album. These elements were, however, instrumental in derailing the R&B trio's fast-track rise from saucy ATL animanics to universally acclaimed pop deities after 1994's *Crazysexycool* sold ten million copies. Calamities such as the group's declaration of bankruptcy, Tionne "T-Boz" Watkins's battle with sickle-cell anemia, and Lisa "Left Eye" Lopez's admission to rehab after torching her then-boyfriend's mansion would have sunk lesser groups. (Only Rozonda "Chilli" Thomas avoided the lightning bolts and collapsing chandeliers.) Heraldic the trio's triumphant rebound on the ruthlessly commercial, bounce-heavy *Fan Mail*, which includes among its battery of future hits "Silly Ho" (as in "I'm not your..."), the loser-baiting "No Scrubs," and the boudoir advisory "Don't Pull Out on Me Yet." So, it's 1999. Are they solvent? Are they healthy? Are they nuts? (Or merely exuberant?) Spin sat each member down separately and discovered there are three sides to every story. —JONATHAN BERNSTEIN

Spin: You've had a remarkable amount of misfortune. Do you think there's a TLC curse?

T-Boz: I wonder. But the more bad things that happen, the more good comes out of it.

Left Eye: Every curse is a blessing. **Chilli:** I've been feeling like that since our first album.

How's T-Boz's health?

T: I've been very good. I was in the hospital seven times in '97 and only once in '98. Stress is a big factor with my disease and [doctors] tell me I'm not living the type of life for the illness I have. But, in the end, it's worth it.

L: That's not a problem. Tionne's health depends on how well she takes care of herself. She can do shows as long as she eats right and rests. With sickle cell, you expect breakdowns. It lasts about a week, then she's back to normal.

C: It's hard. It's harder on her, but also on us because we want to do a lot and she can't. We've been going through this since we've been a group, but it's gotten

worse as she's gotten older. We haven't completed a tour yet.

How's Left Eye's mental health?

T: She's good.

L: My mental health? It's fine. I've had time off from TLC. Doing personal things keeps my mental health in line.

C: People say, "Your group member's crazy; she burned down that man's house." But it was an accident. It was her house. She doesn't have a bad temper. She's just very outspoken.

LaFace's biggest artists, yourself and Toni Braxton, declared bankruptcy at the height of their success.

[In TLC's case, the conflict over a higher royalty rate was subsequently resolved in the group's favor.] Do they run that label like a fruit stand?

T: Toni's situation and ours are totally different. Ours wasn't really LaFace. We

were tied to a contract from when we were managed by Pebbles [‘80s R&B singer and ex-wife of LaFace co-CEO L.A. Reid].

L: LaFace doesn't necessarily raise amarit

artists. They don't tell us what to watch out for. Meanwhile, we depend on them to keep our best interests in mind financially, but that just doesn't happen. Any big act on LaFace would go bankrupt.

C: I can't point the finger at LaFace because our problems started earlier. We were just taken.

Do you have any money now?

T: I've straightened up my situation. I'm out of debt. I have a couple more bills, but I'm living okay.

L: We're fine. We don't have as much money as we would like. We don't even have the money we think we deserve, but it all falls back with us.

C: We have a bit more than we did, but not like we should. You have to look at it like a learning experience. You have to crawl before you can walk. But in this business, it's like you have to crawl through mud before you can walk.

Is it true you wanted out of your LaFace contract so badly you bum-rushed [LaFace distributor and Arista

president] Clive Davis's office with a platoon of burly security guys?

T: That's funny. I'm going to leave that one alone.

L: They weren't security guys; they were girls. We weren't getting anywhere in our negotiations with LaFace, and when we asked why, L.A. Reid put all the blame on Clive. When we went to visit Clive, he put all the blame on L.A.

C: They did. Everyone kept pointing at the big man, so we were like, "Let's go talk to the big man." We ended up leaving on a good note. It was all worth it.

Left Eye on MTV's *The Cut*: The most annoying host on TV?

T: Do people think she's irritating? I'm never home when *The Cut* comes on so I honestly don't know.

L: When I see the show, I'm cracking up at myself.

C: People have their own opinions. Anytime I'm out somewhere—and this is before she got *The Cut* gig—people always come up to me about Left Eye, "That girl, she's crazy. Oh, Lord, that Lisa..."

Pretty Fly Video Director Guy

Joseph McGinty Nichol, a.k.a. McG, on happier youth through shiny escapism: "Maybe some kids' lives suck a little. Maybe they want a release from being latchkey kids and going home to flat Pepsi and Donahue. Maybe they want to see Mase driving around in a Rolls-Royce. What's wrong with dancing girls and big fun?"

That last question is rhetorical. If you go by MTV's weekly Top Ten rankings, McG, 28, is the reigning monarch of music video. From his work on the Offspring's "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)," which features a Greek chorus of Day-Glo-attired hootches, to his clips for Sugar Ray ("Fly"), Bareknuckled Ladies ("One Week"), Korn ("Got the Life"), Fastball ("The Way"), as well as those for Smash Mouth, Wyclef, Mase, and Sublime, the McG oeuvre is lousy with lush colors, goofy humor, bitchin' cars that sometimes explode, and other unassimilable totems of Big Fun. "I try to take the ideas of Spike [Jonze] and mix that with the color and beauty of Hyde [Williams]," says McG. "I got involved in rock'n'roll to have a good time. People make a mistake by equating having a good time with a lack of artistry."

A thought likely shared by Sugar Ray, whose members have been McG's best friends since they grew up together during the early '80s in Newport Beach, California. "Mark [McGrath] knew then and knows now that he isn't John Lennon," McG says. "But he's a really good-looking, charismatic guy. From early on I was like, 'We've got to make a video.'" Next came work with Korn and Cypress Hill, and, eventually, a conversation with, yes, Puffy. "Hey, I'm as infatuated with hip-hop as the next white, Irish kid from Orange County," McG says. Validation from Puffy notwithstanding, McG's process for dreaming up video concepts hasn't changed: "When I get a track in, I'll listen to it with the lights off. Then I'll listen to Freddie Mercury records in a fetal position in my bun-huggers. Then I start visualizing. Seems to work pretty well." —ZEV SOROW



Hey ladies! McG on the set of Sugar Ray's "Fly" video.

The original Spice Girls? TLC, from left, Left Eye, T-Boz, and Chilli.



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Chris Cornell: folkie?

STUDIO TIME

CHRIS CORNELL

Does grunge icon Chris Cornell harbor secret fantasies of being a quiet folkie à la Elliott Smith? Cornell says his first post-Soundgarden solo album following the band's amicable 1997 split will be "singer-songwriter-oriented." "My voice is stripped down and up-front; it's not a big rock guitar record. Everyone's going to be surprised." What he really means is: It won't sound like Soundgarden, okay? The as-yet-untitled album, due out this spring, was recorded at the Los Angeles home studio of Alain Johannes and Natasha Shneider (of the band Eleven), who share playing and production duties with Cornell; his backing band includes ex-Soundgarden drummer Matt Cameron. Cornell is vague about the lyrics, but offers that they are both introspective and retrospective. "You can make things up for a long time," he says, "but at some point you've got to write about yourself: relationships, losing people in your life, pausing and looking back." JESSICA LETKEKEMAN



The Roots: clockwise from top left, Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson, Black Thought, Scratch, Malik B, Hub, and Kamal.

APOCALYPSE NOW

THE ROOTS TAKE ON WORLD CHAOS AND WACK HIP-HOP

The Roots' new album, *Things Fall Apart*, bears all the signs of the Big Statement. There are five separate covers, each featuring a disturbing historical photograph (a crying baby sits in the ruins of Hiroshima; two terrified civil rights activists run from Southern cops; the bloody hand of a dead man clutches a playing card; etc.). The record's title is taken from a literary classic: Chinua Achebe's melancholy novel about the human cost of modernizing Africa. But Roots drummer Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson says the world-chaos theme didn't arise from such recent troubles as bombings and impeachment; it came from a recent article on '80s hip-hop legend Big Daddy Kane.

"He sounded so sad, going on about how he's lost in today's marketplace, like, 'Yo, I don't know what's going on nowadays,'" Thompson says. "We were on the tour bus reading it, and Tariq [a.k.a. Black Thought] said, 'He's like Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart*. In fact, this is the world right now.'" Thankfully, the album's a touch less heavy, in keeping with 1998's *Illadelph Halflife* and the play-parody "What They Do" video, the new album's main villains are hip-hop's forces of wackness. The song "Ain't Seenin' Nothin' New" takes on empty-headed MCs more interested in making a Jeep payment than a point. Still, the Philly crew found such like-minded guest stars as Common and Mos Def (or Black Star) are more interested in teaching by example: introspective atmospherica, where-are-we-going? rhymes, funky live instrumentation (as usual), and even a fiery spoken-word track by Ursula Rucker. "We thought the smartest thing for us to do," says Thompson, "was to celebrate true hip-hop as opposed to just saying, 'Shit's fucked-up.'" MILES MARSHALL LEWIS

WHITE BOYS, BLACK NOIZE

Is this the dawn of Modern Rap?

In the spring of 1998, two Wayne-and-Garth types calling themselves "Josh and Brian" started broadcasting, pirate radio-style, over the Tampa Bay, Florida, FM airwaves. They were a couple of rich surfer dudes broadcasting from a boat, they claimed, cutting into the signal of a local Easy Listening station. Though their show was rife with rock-jock humor, their playlist was a surprise: no Modern Rock, just hip-hop—and in a conservative retiree area that had never had an FM rap station. Soon there was a huge buzz about these two white renegades.

But "Josh" and "Brian" were a put-on, as the local press later discovered: They were employees of the CBS-owned WLWD (Wild 98.7). General Manager Drew Rashbaum conceptualized the radio outlaw chick-flick to launch the station's new format, which was switched from Easy Listening to hip-hop. As far as radio programming goes, this was something new: young white DJs playing the likes of Puffy, Jay-Z, and Master P for a mostly white audience (the Tampa Bay population is less than eight percent black). By the end of '98, WLWD had become one of the most popular stations in the region, and the No. 1 station for the 12-to-24 demographic. "They've proven something that all the consultants claimed was absolutely impossible," says David Sharp, a news anchor at St. Petersburg's WHNZ-AM. "That it's possible to sell an Urban format without a huge African-American audience."

But here's the catch: WLWD is "not an Urban station," according to Rashbaum; it's "Rhythmic Top 40." "Urban radio is black DJs playing for black people, talking about black issues," he says. "Rhythmic means

we play for blacks and whites. It's more multicultural." Is it? WLWD has a black listenership of 35 percent, and one black DJ.

"WLWD is pimping the music," complains Rob Simone, a Latino who spins for Urban outlet WRXB-AM in neighboring St. Petersburg. "It's an Urban station pretending to be [Contemporary Hit Radio] because it's such an easier sell, even if the music is the same." Simone is one of a number of competitors who charge that WLWD is whitewashing hip-hop to make it more palatable to skittish advertisers. "The minute Wild 98 came into town, all the businesses who wouldn't support us all started advertising with them."

But Simone, like many rap fans in the region, is still glad that an all-hip-hop format finally made it onto the FM dial. "It made me listen to radio again," says a white WLWD fan as WLWD blasts at a local record store. "All the other stations totally suck." TONY GREEN



The Wild bunch: DJs at Wild 98.7.



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KNOCKING BOOTS

ON THE FRONT LINES OF THE EVER-NASTIER BOOTLEG AND MP3 WAR

It's 7:30 A.M. in Anaheim Police headquarters, and Detective Mel Vyborny is briefing his men on this morning's sting: an alleged CD bootlegger operating out of his stucco ranch house in this quiet Southern California suburb. On a trash run, members of the Recording Industry Association of America's anti-piracy unit—call them record cops—found a cache of what looked to be counterfeit CDs. One of them was Celine Dion's *Greatest Hits*. And as the search warrant notes, Celine Dion doesn't have a greatest hits CD—not an official one, anyway.

Ninety minutes later, the operation is under way. As an undercover record cop watches from a Lexus parked across the street, four detectives in bulletproof vests approach the suspect's front door. A fifth officer, his gun drawn, stands back to cover them. "Anaheim Police! We've got a warrant!" someone shouts. There's no answer, but the consensus is the suspect is probably home. So they kick in the door and storm the house, quickly gathering up the man's wife and two young children before hunting the suspect down. When the record cop's given the signal, he enters the crime scene and sifts through the evidence: 39 CD copiers (CD-R) scattered throughout the house and 30,000 counterfeit discs ranging from Latin dance to Madonna and the Spice Girls stacked in the garage. There's also a loaded assault rifle, UPS logs listing clients across the nation, and a roll of shrink wrap the size of a bus wheel. "A gold mine!" he says. In fact, it's the RIAA's biggest CD-R bust yet.

The RIAA, an industry lobbying group funded by more than 500 music companies, has been around since 1952, certifying records gold and platinum, surveying music-buying habits, and cracking down on copyright infringement. But bootlegging busts are beginning to overshadow most everything else, as the RIAA reacts to the recent rise of both cheap, mass-market CD burners and MP3 technology, which offers digitized CD-quality songs that can be plucked from the Internet. The RIAA's anti-piracy department is now the largest in the \$2 billion organization, and, since 1993 (when it began keeping stats), it has had a hand in more than 1,500 arrests, several successful lawsuits against CD plants that manufacture counterfeit releases, and the overall stiffening of federal copyright laws. In response, bootleggers have gone for deeper cover, calling in at the end to point guns, kick down doors, and smile for TV cameras. "We try to hand over cases wrapped up in packages already," says Rosen. "Our guys in the field are probably the most underappreciated part of the entire music community. They live and die to protect artists' rights. At flea markets, they get death threats."

The RIAA headquarters in downtown Washington, D.C., feels nothing like a precinct. There's a stereo in every room, and gold records on every wall. But anti-piracy directors Steven D'Onofrio and Frank Creighton are talking in clipped Joe Friday-speak about the RIAA's weapons in the disc wars: They pay informants to provide "intelligence" and "make buys." They train FBI agents, brief congressional panels, lecture about online piracy at colleges, and collaborate with bigwigs such as New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who was awarded an honorary gold record for his help on a street vendor sting. Elsewhere in the building, recent college grads endlessly work for illegal MP3 files.

Protecting artistic freedom and property is obviously an admirable mission, but the RIAA's many critics complain that the organization often crosses the line. Take, for instance, the battle over Diamond Multimedia's Rio, a portable, Walkman-style device that downloads and plays MP3 files. Though everyone from the Beastie Boys to David Bowie has posted free MP3 files on the Internet, in October the RIAA filed suit against Diamond Multimedia, claiming the Rio caters to pirates. Diamond filed a countersuit, and both cases are pending. In the meantime, the Rio is still on the market, retailing for about \$200. "The RIAA wants to try and hold back the MP3 business until they can come up with a format that they can control," says Ken Wirt, Diamond's vice president of corporate marketing. "The record industry does not own the starting gun for competition." December, the RIAA announced plans for the Secure Digital Music Initiative, through which record companies plan to develop a way to distribute music on the Internet in a new, protective format. But the RIAA has already drawn some online snickers for proposing a \$50,000 fee for those who want to sit on the steering committee.

Michael Robertson, Webmaster of MP3.com, a site with about 8,000 legally posted songs, says the RIAA's online policing is "heavy-handed, like killing ants with a hammer." Jack Malin, a Long Island 15-year-old with a homepage that simply links to sound clips, came home from school one day to find an RIAA letter warning him of a potential three years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. (Malin took the site down.) In November, San Francisco-based musical guerrillas Negativland, who were sued for copyright infringement in the early '90s, were outraged when their usual CD plant (citing a new RIAA pamphlet boasting of recent courtroom victories over any party participating in the production of



Hey, how much for that counterfeit CD? shopping for bootlegs in New York City.

"OUR GUYS IN THE FIELD LIVE AND DIE TO PROTECT ARTISTS' RIGHTS," SAYS THE RIAA'S CEO HILARY ROSEN.

moving from factories to suburban garages, though their product is still often sold openly on city sidewalks, at flea markets, and even in mom-and-pop record stores. Booters have also taken to the Internet, where the RIAA's attack-dog approach has been, at times, woefully out of touch.

"Pirates impact much more than just record companies and artists," says RIAA attorney Charles Lawhorn, a former Los Angeles County deputy district attorney. "They hurt legitimate stores, people who work in the industry, and also the economy, as these people aren't likely to pay taxes." While watching the Anaheim sting unfold, Lawhorn solemnly explains how piracy costs the industry \$300 million the U.S. alone. How it compromises creative freedom because artists lose control of how their music is distributed. How it forces record companies to jack up CD prices to account for losses. How it screws anyone who, after buying a badly recorded bootleg, can't get a refund. How the RIAA wants to make sure booters are locked up. "We want to send a message that this doesn't pay," Lawhorn says.

It's hard to believe that before 1972, dubbing music wasn't even a crime. Today, piracy is a violation of federal law, and 36 states consider booting a felony. Still, RIAA President and CEO Hilary Rosen complains that urban police are unlikely to make copyright infringement a high priority when they've got drug dealers and murderers to worry about. Hence, the RIAA's record-cop force—largely comprised of former policemen who do most of the investigative legwork themselves. The real cops get

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RIAA CRACKDOWN

(continued) counterfeit music) refused to process their sample-heavy release, *The Weatherman's Dumb Stupid Come-Out Line*. After hundreds of e-mailed protests from Negativland's supporters, the RIAA's Rosen sent an additional paragraph to plant managers—"a concession," she says—suggesting they consult attorneys rather than immediately reject material. "There are real thieves out there who should be stopped," says Negativland's Don Joyce, "but you shouldn't be able to throw out the innocent with the guilty."

Despite the criticism, the record cops are proud of their jobs. Rolling down the freeway from L.A. to San Diego, an undercover RIAA agent says, "It's as close to police work as any person's going to find and still not be a policeman." He arrives at a San Diego shopping center for a late afternoon bust. The target is a small store, and the officers simply flash their warrant and cruise right in. It's going to be a long night, with a heap of pirated CDs and more than 5,000 videos to haul away. During a break, the record cop eats a slice of pizza and trades some standard-issue police stories—a guy who got "tapped," a firebug who "skated." Around midnight, he hops into his truck for the ride home, knowing that Celine and Madonna can sleep a little easier tonight. A record cop is on the beat. **GEOFF EDGERS**

BACKSTAGE PASS

LeAnn Rimes and Sharon Stone shake their moneymakers

There's a fine line between selfless charity and self-promotion—not that anyone has the nerve to point out when celebrities cross it. AmFar spokescabbe **Sharon Stone** hosted a \$5,000-a-seat dinner party honoring passionate AIDS activists **Tom Hanks**, **Barbara Walters**, and Arista Records honcho **Clive Davis**. The evening's entertainment kicked off with **Barry Manilow** performing songs from his new CD of Sinatra covers, and asking the crowd, "Who would've thought I'd turn out to become the sex god I've become?" Later, **Sean "Puffy" Combs** and **Mase** had the room—especially rump-shakin' Stone—jumping to "Been Around the World."

Combe freestyled such lines as, "Yo, Puffy's got the cure for AIDS! Everybody say yea-ah! Put your hands in the air, y'all!" In his acceptance speech, Davis found the

perfect opportunity to hype **Whitney Houston's** *My Love Is Your Love* quasi-comeback album. "She has gotten the reviews of her life!" he told the crowd, which included **Wyclef Jean**, **Mary J. Blige**, and **Faith Evans**. "She's come back to show 'em how it's done." Houston then took the stage and showed 'em: "Can we do this?" she scolded her band, which had started playing before Her Royal Divaness was ready. "Can we do this again?" she seethed, scowling at the embarrassed musicians. "All right," Houston finally ordered, "rock it..."

Smash Mouth helped GameWorks (the Starbucks of video arcade chains) celebrate the opening of their Orange County, California, outlet by performing at a party, which attracted the likes of **Shaquille O'Neal**, **Vivica A. Fox**, **Angie Everhart**, that kid from **Jerry Maguire**, and **LeAnn Rimes** (an inexplicably fanatical fan of the date to one ska-punk hit-wonders). "LeAnn insisted on being in the front row," claims an eyewitness. Well, that just wasn't good enough for the teenage spotlight hog, who, possibly inspired by Courtney Cox and Bruce Springsteen in his "Dancing in the Dark" video, jumped onstage and shook her back to the front row. At set's end, Harwell, possibly inspired by Dorothy and the Wicked Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*, thanked Rimes for her inspired vocal stylings by dumping water over her big-haired head. (No, she didn't melt.) "She was a good sport about it," says the spy. "She thought it was funny." Rimes's publicist isn't laughing: "There was no water thrown on her!" barked the flack. "Somebody jumped up onstage, but it wasn't her. The singer threw water, but she was in the 12th or 13th row..."

If a hard-knock life for **Greg Gulli**, **The Afghan Whigs** frontman/walking rock 'n' roll cliché is recuperating from a skull fracture, which resulted from a 2 A.M. brawl with a bouncer outside the Liberty Lunch club in

Giving it up for charity: Wyclef and Whitney Houston.

MICROGENRE ALERT

BLIP-HOP

Sounds Like: The Future Sound of Compton

Comes From: Though hip-hop and techno were both born on Planet Rock in 1982, they were separated on earth. Late, though, the genres have once again been moving toward each other. Check the importance of MCs in jungle culture. Or the collaborations between rappers and electronics producers on MTV's *Amp 2.0*. Or "Call Me When You Need Some," a song by No Limit rappers Kane and Abel, which features the duo comparing their dicks to Tek-9s over what sounds like a Clustar track circa 1977. Now, the last street, least

dance-floor segment of techno—the Aphex Twin–inspired danzines of "Electronic Listening Music"—is getting into the act, whipping up arid, jittery "blip-hop" remixes complete with mutated rapping.

Suggested Listening: Wu-Tang Clan's "Reunited" (*Funkstarung Remix*) off the *Funkstarung EP* (Studio K7); East Flatbush Project's *Tried by 12 EP* featuring remixes by Autchare, Squarapuisher, and Push Button Objects (*Ninja Tune*)

Future Collaborations: The Wu-Tang Clan, Howie B and Boikim, Bone-Thugs-N-Worgon—Christ

JEFF SALAMON



Comin' back Barry: Mr. Manilow does Sinatra.

Austin, Texas. Consequently, the band have postponed their sold-out national tour and are suing the club. "Right now none of the Whigs is talking to the press," said the band's spokesman, "under the advisement of their lawyer..."

Step aside, Jakob Dylan, Sean Lennon, etc.; **Ashley Hamilton**—pale son of perm-tanned actor **George** and Rod Stewart's ex **Alana**—is the new celebuton on the block. But Hamilton isn't following in his famous father's footsteps. At least not after appearing in such movies as *Beethoven's 2nd*. "I played the boyfriend of Charles Grodin's daughter, and the dog tears my house apart," he less-than-fondly recalls. "I never wanted to act—I just did it for the money." Instead Hamilton, 24, has formed the band **Fine**, which will release their debut album, *Against the View*, in March. Hamilton's aversion to acting may be linked to his two-micro-1993 marriage to TV/real-life witch **Shannen Doherty**, of which the now-sober actor says simply, "There were a lot of drugs involved." **JAMES PATRICK HERMAN**



PHOTOS (FROM LEFT): PATRICK MCHOLLAN; LONDON FEATURES



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EXPOSURE 03/99

BIG BIS

pg.62... FIREARM THEME PARK

pg.64... TAKASHI MURAKAMI

pg.66... BLESS SHOES

NEW-PRODUCT FREE-OFF

pg.68... COOL BREEZE

pg.78... GRBY HOFFMAN

pg.74... POCKET BIKES

THE SPIN 25

POST-TEEN BEAT Long before they penned the into-battle theme to *The Powerpuff Girls*, the Cartoon Network's preteen superhero show, Bis seemed like cartoon characters. Whether issuing stern edicts from "The Teen-C Revolution," their manifesto dedicated to youthful exuberance, or delivering sped-up, herky-jerky consumer critiques, the Glasgow trio remained as huggable as Rugrats. "People wanted us to be that so we could be easily ridiculed," says singer Amanda Mackinnon, who cofounded the group with brothers Steven and John Clark. "Our records have been quite in-depth, and anyone who has an ear for music would recognize that."

While their 1997 debut album, *The New Transistor Heroes*, helped them achieve legitimate pop star status in Japan ("I think they like us because I'm the only British person under 5'3" that's been there," reasons Mackinnon), the new *Social Dancing* ventures beyond the playpen toward more mature dramas. Alongside buoyant dissections of talk-show makeovers and over-possessive boyfriends (like "Eurodise," an amazingly accurate reanimation of Duran Duran). That song, along with "Action & Drama" ("Give us action and drama / Give us '80s *Madonna*"), suggests a group giddily transfixed on a bygone era. "It's not a nostalgia thing," says Steven Clark. "It's just that the quality of stars was better then. We were at the forefront of the '80s revival more than three and a half years ago. Now they're making all these new teen movies, but no one is asking us to be on the soundtrack." JONATHAN BERNSTEIN



Bis: from left,
Steven Clark,
John Clark, and
Amanda Mackinnon
perform their rendition
of *Swan Lake*.

EXPOSURE

FIREARM TRAINING PARK

FAMILY GUN FUN In this age of theme-parked everything, it was only a matter of time before someone discovered that guns, like dinosaurs and aliens, can be fun for the whole family. Starting later this year, parents and their twitchy teenage offspring will be able to spend a weekend learning the fine art of live-fire urban combat at the Front Sight Firearms Training Institute, a \$6 million, 550-acre ballistics wonderland just outside Las Vegas. Essentially a highly gentrified, highly marketable upgrade of grimy gunfighting schools, the facility will offer classroom sessions—all housed in tasteful Mediterranean-style villas landscaped with palm trees—hi-tech shooting ranges, and “live fire simulators.” For Front Sight President Ignatius Piazza, a former chiropractor, it’s all about making the world a better place. “As a chiropractor, my purpose was to help people live happier, pain-free lives,” he says. “Now, instead of teaching people the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, I’m teaching them to become skilled with firearms so they can defend themselves or their loved ones. We’re not trying to train killers.” Herewith, a sample of the many bangs students can get for their 500-plus bucks. **VINCE BEISER**



DRIVE-BY SHOOTING

In order to better negotiate highways overrun with homicidal road ragers, students practice returning fire from behind the wheel. Drivers zip around a six-lane track, popping multiple attackers, snipers, and other moving vehicles. The school’s staff of Vietnam vets, moonlighting cops, and ex-special agents will also teach students how to lose a tailing auto—ideal for paparazzi-weary celebrities and kidnap-anxious CEOs.



UNDER FIRE

Front Sight has laid out 400 yards of interconnected tunnels to simulate subway-style combat. Inside, students take shots at mannequins, or enjoy the noisier thrill of pursuing attackers through endless passageways during live fire training. Sewage and rats, fortunately, are not included.

STANDOFF AT THE MALL

Proving life is, in fact, a movie, heavily armed students room movie-of-the-week-type sets learning crucial skills such as sweeping a room or taking on multiple attackers. Inside, say, a 7-Eleven, or scattered throughout a mall parking lot, stand 3-D mannequins that ring when you hit them. The real fun, though, is “force-on-force” training, where students gun each other down using actual guns that shoot point cartridges. For more advanced sharpshooters, there’s tactical night shooting, in which students master low-light intrusions and, more important, discover the secret of holding a flashlight and a gun at the same time.



VIDEO VIOLENCE

Students train for urban survival with the help of a reality-based CD-ROM game. Armed with realistic pistols or shotguns hooked up to a computer, players face a ten-foot screen, then react to various “real-life” scenarios. For instance, while walking down an alley, you come across an angry-looking vagrant yelling obscenities. You try to avoid him, but he starts moving toward you, and pulls out something shiny. Gun him down, but not before he brandishes a weapon (you’ll lose points). Other plotlines include a disgruntled employee, an angry wife with a knife, and, strangely, a hostile drunk with a baby carriage.



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Ero-pop Tokyo: right,
"Hiropon" at play.



THE DIRTY MIND OF ANIME "All art is emptiness," says Takashi Murakami, though you wouldn't know it from the 36-year-old artist's freakishly endowed Japanimation sculptures. Murakami's life-size cartoon figures, currently on display at Marianne Boesky Gallery in New York City, include "Hiropon" (Japanese slang for heroin), a fiberglass nymphet with breasts the size of microware ovens and a jump-rope fashioned from her own breast milk, and her male counterpart, "My Lonesome Cowboy," an aroused man-child who wields his rope of hard-edged jism like a creamy lasso.

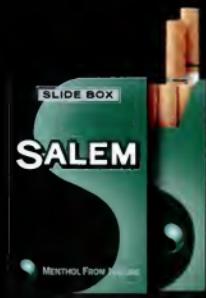
Murakami is the leader of Japan's "Neo-Pop" school, a late-'90s movement of artists and media-savvy kids who see straight through happy Japano-kitsch to the country's brittle plastic heart. He bases his sculptures on popular manga comic and Nintendo stars, as well as the highly technological zines of anime-loving otaku ("geeks"). While Murakami scouts otaku conventions for his characters' hairstyles and outfits (and plays a lot of Final Fantasy for inspiration), his art's hypersexualized twist is entirely his own. Opening up the cultural kimono and revealing the already masturbatory undercurrent of

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Japanese comics, games, and toys doesn't necessarily go over in Japan, however.

"In the U.S., art-people and intellectuals understand my art," Murakami says, "but in Japan, they hate it—because it's a self-portrait of the Japanese in the 1990s." By making two-dimensional manga babes three-dimensionally real—from their delicate Buddha hands to their scary, multifaceted Western eyes—Murakami tweaks typical Japanese male fantasies, bumping the flat-chested, dark-haired virgins of ancient Asian art up against the blond bombshells of good ol' American T&A.

But the voracious pop-culture machine works its alchemical magic, even in Japan—which means Murakami's once-transgressive art is suddenly hip there. In fact, Murakami has managed to parlay his art's bad-boy appeal into a budding commercial empire. His "Hippon Factory" turns out watches and T-shirts featuring his totem characters, and at otaku conventions he's worshipped like Chris Carter at an *X-Files* expo. One of the reasons the otaku love Murakami is his obsessive attention to detail. "The fabrication of these things is always absolutely perfect," says Murakami's Los Angeles dealer, Jeff Poe.

Weaned on the Carpenters and Japanese sci-fi movies, Murakami is an ardent fan of kitschy popsters such as Cornelius and *Fantastic Plastic Machine*. Because he



knows pop creatures have perilously short half-lives, his cast of characters changes as frequently as *The Real World*'s. His single most consistent—and most malleable—creation is *Mr. DOB*. For six years, this bubble-headed cross between *Mickey Mouse* and Hello Kitty has embodied Japan's cultural id, evolving from a benignly smiling *Macy's*-parade balloon to a black-eyed, snaggletoothed demon. Murakami will unveil *Mr. DOB*'s latest incarnation as part of a show that will tour U.S. museums later this year. "Right now, *Mr. DOB* is melting, like the liquid-metal creature in *Terminator II*," Murakami says with a laugh. "He's traveling, looking for himself—he's confused, just like the Japanese people." DAVID A. GREENE



Geek chic: clockwise from top, the ever-morphing "Mr. DOB"; Murakami with "My Lonesome Cowboy"; two frolicking anime nymphs from the "Sakureko" series.

EXPOSURE

BLESS SHOES

NEW-PRODUCT FACE-OFF

SOLE POWER Hi-tech athletic footwear is all about the elusive custom fit—the notion that some elaborate permutation of gels and foam will make your rank, sweaty sneaker a singular shoe. But Bless, a European label that works against “mass individuality and its hidden dangers,” etc., etc., has actually made good on this absurd promise with what they simply call “customized footwear.” Three hundred dollars gets you a pair of New Balance soles (plus a rather tony set of Charles Jourdan pumps) stitched to Vetrat, a stretchy material mainly favored by doctors for treating sprained joints. You pull, tape, twist, and paste the fabric to suit your foot, and end up with a shoe that looks like something an urban Sherpa would wear. “The inspiration came from the material,” says Parisian-based Bless cofounder Desirée Hess (who cryptically defines the typical Bless consumer as someone who “has no nationality, and thinks sport is quite nice”), “We needed to connect the material to a fixed form, so working with a shoe was quite evident.” Available in boutiques in New York, L.A., and major European cities, the shoes have a limited run, and 100 of the 250 available worldwide have been sold already. “Somebody asked me if this will be a whole trend, but I don’t think so,” Hess says realistically. “As much as I like the idea of not just consuming something, most people can’t spend another hour before they go out. They want something that’s already ready.” MAUREEN CALLAHAN



Fighting “mass individuality and its hidden dangers”—the Bless custom sneaker—serious assembly required.



NEW-PRODUCT FACE-OFF



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DIMENSIONS	Approximately 7"	Approximately 67"
OBTINABLE PURPOSE	To provide separate compartments for two different flavors of Slurpee.	To play Zoe, a sardonic teen who “experiences the longings, anxieties, and pitfalls of young-adult life in New York City” in the quirky new WB sitcom <i>Zoe, Duncan, Jack & Jane</i> .
OPTIONS	Special “brain-shaped” top has two straw holes, making it easy to share the two-sided Slurpee beverage.	Could special-guest-star as the “cousin from Michigan” on <i>Dawson’s Creek</i> or <i>Felicity</i> .
UNIQUE SELLING PROPOSITION	“Customers who preferred two flavors at a time faced a dilemma... We’ve made their lives a little easier.”	Teens who are not yet depressed or self-loathing enough to identify with <i>Felicity</i> now have an alternative.
IMPRESSIVE TECHNOLOGY	The top is brain-shaped.	In the upcoming <i>Dangerous Liaisons</i> knockoff <i>Cruel Intentions</i> , the genuinely funny Blair exhibits a flair for elation.
POTENTIAL DRAWBACK	At press time, cups are available only in 7-Eleven stores in Texas, Florida, Colorado, Virginia, and Salt Lake City.	Once appeared with Suzanne Somers in the made-for-television movie event <i>No Laughing Matter</i> .
SPECIAL CARE INSTRUCTIONS	Handle with care. Limited supply guarantees “collector’s item” status.	Wash and dry. Style as usual.
USER-FRIENDLINESS	High. Americans drink more than ten million Slurpees each month.*	High. Blair’s sharp-witted <i>Zoe</i> is sweet relief in a silicon-filled world of self-absorbed New Yorkers.
ADVANTAGE		Selma Blair. She’s got a name that makes you think she whips up great pancakes.

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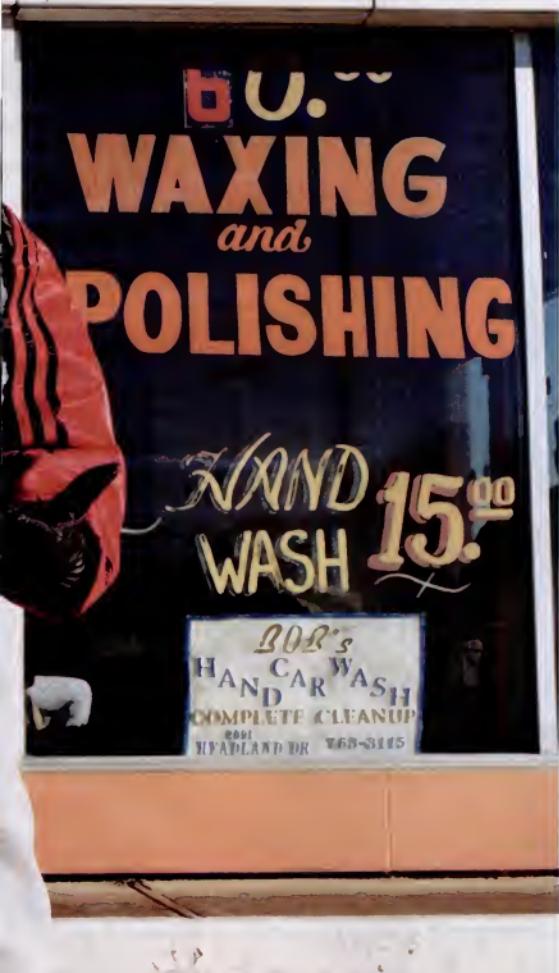
COOL BREEZE

Do Detox

-WOMEN-



illing



COOL LIKE DAT Three years ago, Frederick Colhoun, a.k.a. Cool Breeze, laid down a bleak, existential gangster's vision of urban Atlanta he called "The Dirty South." Inspired by the poverty he encountered growing up in the city's East Point district, those self-penned verses powered the Goodie Mob single of the same name, and the phrase was soon picked up by Southern beatheads everywhere. The track's success, though, proved to be a mixed blessing for the latest progeny of the Organized Noize crew. "Everybody was wanting more 'Dirty South'-type stuff," Cool Breeze says, explaining why he held off on recording his own album until recently. "But I wanted to take my time, get all my shit tight, and hit people with some different shit."

That different shit is collected on the raunchily titled *East Point's Greatest Hit*, an ear-tickling collection of old-school noise, Curtis Mayfield soul, and round-the-way grooves. The exhilarating first single, "Watch for the Hook" (a rifl an lyrical knockout), showcases fellow Organized members Outkast, Goodie Mob, and Witch Doctor, a tip of the mic for the vocal duty Cool Breeze did on their respective albums. Cool Breeze was "Taving Run-D.M.C. and LL Cool J and the whole Krush Groove thing" before he signed up with Organized in the early '90s. "And my father was into music. He had a beautiful high-pitched voice. He was like the guy who hit all the high notes in the Temptations." Cool Breeze's own vocal inflections are more plain-spoken. "That's just my spot," he says. "I have always liked that laid-back type of flow. A lot of people come out showing everything they got, and then after that it's like, 'What's next?' I always have something to keep people guessing." **TONY GREEN**

Cool Breeze: Atlanta's exemplar of "that laid-back type of flow."

EXPOSURE

GIBY HOFFMAN



Waterproof:
"My upbringing,"
says Hoffman,
"was...interesting."

THE ACCIDENTAL SUBURBANITE

Gaby Hoffmann's mom is *Viva*, the actress, the icon, the Andy Warhol superstar. Hoffmann's childhood was a nonstop parade of glamour and fabulously fine, yes? "I started acting when I was five because we were on welfare," says Hoffman, who, with her short, curly mop of brown hair and makeup-free face, resembles a less vampy Drew Barrymore. "It's not like I ever really decided to act." But she acted anyway, appearing in countless commercials and about a dozen movies while being raised in NYC's Chelsea Hotel, notorious for drug dealers, prostitutes, asbestos, and *Sid & Nancy*. This year, the 17-year-old Hoffmann stars in no less than five films: the long-delayed *Strike*; the indie *Snapped*; the all-improv hip-hop comedy *Black and White* ("I say 'Yo, whassup!' a lot"); *Coming Soon*, a sex farce; and February's *200 Cigarettes*, in which she's cast against type as a fearful suburbanite trolling New York's East Village on New Year's Eve in 1981 ("It's a fun movie with good music, but it's not a cinematic masterpiece"). Having recently returned to New York after a disturbing stint in L.A. ("My mom's still out there because we don't have the money to move her back"), Hoffmann has acquired a taste for simple things in life—90210, *Trivial Pursuit*...MTV's *Fanatic*. "Ohmigod, I am obsessed with that show. My boyfriend wants to do it for me. He wants to be the fan for me," says Hoffman. "But I'm like, I'm not famous enough. So we're gonna wait for a little bit." **MAUREEN CALLAHAN**

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EXPOSURE

POCKET BIKES
THE SPIN 25



WAY EASY RIDERS When Drew Waldman ditched his Suzuki street racer for a Polini pocket bike, it was literally a step down. Way down. The 39cc Polini is a mere 19 inches tall, and Waldman had to squat, frog-style, to position his 5'11" frame on the puny seat. Yet what the 46-pound two-wheeler lacks in stature, it compensates for in serious yahoo potential. "I get the funniest looks from people," says Waldman, 30, who races and sells pocket bikes through his company, Future Sports, in San Clemente, California. "They think I'm on a tricycle. Then they see me going 50 miles per hour and doing wheelies, and they're shocked."

Long a weekend sport in Europe, where riders as young as four years old often compete, pocket bike racing has recently taken off with U.S. riders who want to indulge a road-racing fantasy but don't want to risk multiple head traumas. The bikes, which are so light and low to the ground that wipe-outs are relatively benign, first appeared in Japan more than 20 years ago as a novelty gag. Now, riders such as Gabriel Suarez (pictured) pony up to \$3,000 for the predominantly Italian-made machines, most of which can reach a respectable 75 mph. Since pocket bikes are outlawed on U.S. streets (except in fun-loving Virginia), racing clubs like the newish Microfite Motor Sports of Hawaii commandeer local go-kart tracks or fashion makeshift courses out of hay

bales and cones. "It's really fun to just open up [the throttle] and dig your knee into it," says Lydia Belshe, a 26-year-old model and one of the top riders in the 35-member Honolulu-based club. There is one major drawback, however. As Waldman sadly points out, "There's no backseat to pick up girls." LEORA BROYDO



THE SPIN 25 / MARCH 1999

THIS MONTH	LAST MONTH	ARTIST TITLE	NOTING ON CHART
1	-	APATHY ♀ NEW STREAMLINED VERSION BETTER THAN EVER!	1
2	7	TEENAGERS THEY'RE NOT TEENS, THEY'RE YOUNG ADULTS	999
3	-	YOUNG ADULTS PREFERRED BY MARKETERS TWO-TO-ONE	1
4	-	JEWEL'S HORSE, CHANCE 'HER LOVE, HER DRUG, HER INSPIRATION'	1
5	4	THAT OFFSPRING DISCO-SUCKS-STYLE NOVELTY SONG SINGLE-HANDEDLY SAVING MOD-ROCK?	3
6	23	APES THE NEW LEO	6
7	-	Y2K VS. GROUNDHOG DAY + GROUNDHOG DAY, BY A NOSE	1
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Running, jumping, and standing still: The Fab Four flee the scene in *A Hard Day's Night*.



1 MOVIES

FOOL'S GOLD

Rediscovering the sublime stupidity of *A Hard Day's Night*; plus, the world's first musical comedy about AIDS. by Bob Davis

In 1963, the Beatles still had two years on their Parlophone contract at a ludicrous penny per single sold. But because the contract didn't cover film scores, they made two movies for United Artists, in 1964 and 1965. No one at UA cared about the movies. No development meetings, no focus groups. They let the Beatles about themselves, choose the director, choose the writer. UA just wanted the soundtracks for their record division.

It's hardly a surprise, then, that the first music video that truly matters comes smack in the middle of a Beatles movie. The four mop-heads in coordinated jackets and ties throw themselves around a makeshift playground. Spastic silent-film antics are mixed with shaky helicopter cam. Paul flies. John flies. George flies. Ringo struggles to lift off, can only hop. There's running, jumping, and standing still. Simple. Stupid. But for sheer psycho-electric joy—the performers', the filmmakers',

ours—the "Can't Buy Me Love" segment blows away anything on today's MTV.

Which is why Miramax's rerelease of Richard Lester's 1964 *A Hard Day's Night* makes perfect sense in 1999. Thirty-five years ago, the Beatles movie celebrated the demise of the dour, defeatist "angry young man" syndrome, celebrated the explosion of a dynamic, positive youth culture. According to Lester, "There was a sudden gaining of confidence, and the Beatles told everyone, 'You can damn well do anything you like, just go out and do it!'" As if to prove that statement, Lester (a then-32-year-old director of TV docs and an insane proto-Python home movie) whipped up *A Hard Day's Night* on a tight schedule (United Artists wanted a summer release in order to cash in before the whole Beatles thing blew over) and on a small budget (that's why it's black and white). It was fast, cheap, and out of control.

Shot in now-familiar fake-documentary style, *A Hard Day's Night* is an >>



MOVIE > *20 Dates* (DIRECTED BY MYLES BERKOWITZ) Berkowitz (Woody Allen wannabe, emotional retard, icky Adams reject) can't act, can't write, can't direct. His faux-documentary, a signal example of the film school wacky-date movie-by-that-obnoxious-guy-who-doesn't-quite-get-that-he's-annoying-everyone genre ostensibly chronicles him going on a series of 20 unsuccessful dates. Only the film-within-the-film's pond-scum, bottom-line producer—who wants to increase the film's T&A quotient—sees where all this is leading: "You're gonna go on 20 dates and you're gonna end up jerkin' off in your apartment." **a.**

<< The dog trick (unsuccessful): Myles Berkowitz tries to score in *20 Dates*.

2 TELEVISION

WE'RE A HAPPY FAMILY

7th Heaven's pathologically perfect values, by Jonathan Bernstein

Earlier this season on the WB's *7th Heaven*, the show's teenage siblings, Mary and Matt, went on an impromptu road trip. Naturally, the car broke down in the middle of nowhere. And naturally, a tow truck just happened to be passing by. The two graciously thanked the driver for saving them from having to walk for miles in search of a phone. When the guy brought up cell phones, they stared at him incomprehendingly. "What year do

you kids live in?" he asked. Anyone who has watched as much as a minute of the series has to wonder the same thing.

7th Heaven is the WB's dirty little secret. Smack dab in the middle of the subtext, the anguished self-analysis, the roiling hormones, and the moist Clintonian late-nine-tiesness of the rest of the network, *7th Heaven's* Camdens are a back-to-the-'50s family who seem to have leapt fully formed from the fevered brow of Kenneth Starr. One might dismiss *Heaven* as an absurd throwback to the days when a stern dad and perpetually cookie-baking mom



Righteous siblings: *7th Heaven's* teenage brood.

ruled the roost with a firm but fair hand, but the three-season-old series has, against all prevailing cultural calculus, established itself as the network's highest rated program. Last November's sweeps saw it pull in a blockbuster (for the still-teething WB) 7.2 million viewers, crushing such defiantly now-colleagues as *Dawson's Creek*, *Buffy*, and that sluggish upstart, *Felicity*.

One can only assume that it is *7th Heaven's* almost surreally stout-hearted denial of contemporary reality—even the family dog is called "Happy"—that makes it a winner, while *Felicity's* >>

3 BOOKS

BABE FACTOR

It's a scientific fact: Pretty young things rule, by Kim France

Every few years, there is a fresh outcry over the fact that heavily retouched fashion photographs render models—who already enforce an impossibly high standard of attractiveness—easily, inhumanly flawless. The fear is that women, especially teenagers, will measure themselves against these cyborg-babes and inevitably find themselves wanting. At one point, an idea was floated among media watchdog types that any picture that had been drastically airbrushed should bear a small

warning label. But what would that fix? Women have been striving for physical perfection since long before fashion glossies came on the scene. And, in fact, as scientist/psychologist Nancy Etcoff argues in *Survival of the Prettiest*, physical attractiveness is a basic survival skill. "The idea that beauty is unimportant or a cultural construct is the real beauty myth," Etcoff writes,

alluding to Naomi Wolf's 1991 best-seller *The Beauty Myth*, in which the author posits that women's obsession with youthful babitude is the result of a corporate conspiracy. Etcoff sets out to prove that the blame cannot simply be laid at the feet of such institutions as Revlon, Kate Moss, and the American Society of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgeons. Instead, she argues, we're hard-wired to seek potential mates who are virile, fertile, and at least 85 percent fat-free. In short, looks are everything.

The problem is, to agree with this premise is to let one of feminism's most long-standing scapegoats—patriarchal,

money-grubbing corporate maniacs—at least partially off the hook. It also disputes the proactive, Body Shopish notion that in a healthier world, we'd find Venus-of-Willendorf-shaped women as hot as Laetitia Casta. Am I the only right-thinking, Camille Paglia-hating, modern feminist chick who has long suspected this just wasn't so? I doubt it. It's easier to blame some evil institution for the incredible arbitrariness with which fate and genetics dole out looks. It's far more troubling to consider that beauty may be a more valuable asset than a Ph.D. in comparative studies.

It is, in reality, a colossal drag to be confronted with so many examples >>

1 > MOVIES CONTINUED

ebullient "day in the life" of the Beatles that the filmmakers pretty much made up as they went. Six-year-old boys form a mini-human pyramid so the top boy can drop an inverted bucket over a bobby's head. George shaves the reflection of a roadie's face in a mirror. John splash-torpedoes Nazi toy subs in his bubble bath. Like, say, *The Waterboy*, the Beatles movie flaunts its ain't-we-naughty-boys childishness.

Still, two features distinguish *A Hard Day's Night*'s foolishness. First, it's a smart, even cultured foolishness. Paul studied literature; John went to art school; Alun Owen (*Hard Day's* screenwriter) was Britain's top playwright. Lester, who had an I.Q. of 186 and described himself as a "surrealist gag man," was something of a polymath. Second, the film's unadulterated joy and silliness is 100 percent authentic. The Beatles' boyish energy was an expression of unbridled optimism, aillesus as subversion. When, an hour into the film, George opens the wrong door and becomes the test audience for a new line of clothes for kids, he's unimpressed with the marketing firm's "resident teen" and spokesmodel; he finds the fashions "grotty." An ad exec considers George's antipathy a facade. "That pose is out, too," he says, "the new thing is to care passionately, and to be

right-wing." But the thing is, George's attitude is not calculated. The movie and its stars are pre-Madonna, anti-pose, real. When Ringo says, "You learn a lot from books," he really means it. When the boys are "having fun," they're really having fun. You can tell. "They were brilliant," the film's producer once said, "at playing themselves."

And the response generated by all this realness is real too. It's hard even to compare it to *Spice World*, a rehash of *Hard Day's Night*'s 48-hours-on-the-road, which replaces the Beatles' boyish anarchic playtime with Girl Power's doorknob-dull-politically-correct messages. When the Girls sing "Wannabe," their fans—Hollywood extras, dispassionate >>



Hair band: The Beatles get styled.

BOOKS CONTINUES



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BOOK > Whatever BY MICHEL HOUELLEBECQ (HARPER'S TALE) The narrator of novelist Houellebecq's Euro-slacker tome is so disaffected he might as well be dead. "No sex drive, no ambition, no real interests," he writes, in what has to be one of the least flattering self-assessments of all time. Causing us way of Douglas Coupland, this French best-seller (now out in English translation) abhors Generation X's fixation on bad jobs, but here, our unnamed twenty-something's world isn't plastic, just filled with boneheads who have "the features and the behavior of a pig." His incandescent wit is the novel's principal charm, and it's no wonder that, confronted by such grotesques, our dude goes a little mad, trying to good an ugly man into killing a girl who rejects him, slapping a coworker, even hitting on his psychopathic girl. He may be a loser, baby, but his cruelty proves he wants to live after all. **ALEXANDRA LANGE**

2 > TELEVISION CONTINUED

latest hour-long self-esteem crisis leaves that show floundering in the mid-3s. Viewers have always found rock-solid TV families irresistible, and *7th Heaven* is the latest in a warm'n'fuzzy lineage that includes *The Waltons*, *Aaron Spelling's Family*, and my personal favorites, *A Year in the Life* and *Life Goes On*. Hyper-ironic teens and swinging parents may get all the ink nowadays, but a world in which addiction to caffeine counts as a drug problem gets the viewers.

7th Heaven's bizarro family is, in its way, as fantastical as *Buffy's* vampire high school. Alarm bells start clanging whenever pious minister dad Eric

(Stephen Collins) announces, "I don't want to sound judgmental, but..." indicating he's about to find someone or something morally deficient. These are the extracurricular activities Eric and wife Annie (Catherine Hicks) condone for their teenagers: baby-sitting, volunteering in soup kitchens, participating in Nativity plays. This is what they disapprove of: everything else. When eldest son Matt was foolish enough to hide a friend's joint in the house, Eric and Annie exploded into histrionics the producers of *Reefer Madness* would have deemed excessive. Eldest daughter Mary's coed sleepover with her high

school's basketball squad solicited scarcely calmer reactions. Their physical hotness notwithstanding, it's amazing that Mary (Jessica Biel) and Matt (Barry Watson, soon to be seen in a very un-Matt-like light in Kevin Williamson's *Killing Mrs. Tingle*) are ever tempted from the path of righteousness.

In this running rebuttal to *Pleasantville*, it makes perfect sense that the pair never indulge in any slang, pop culture references, or

sexual innuendo. When they spend time with their more fashion-forward peers, they seem like missionaries sent to civilize an unwashed and barbaric tribe. Then there's the rest of the Camden clan: Lucy (Beverly Mitchell, who makes you want to offer penance for ever taking the name Lacey Chabert in vain), a boys-boys bubblehead; precocious Simon (David Gallagher); and scrunch-faced moppet Ruthie >>

TELEVISION CONTINUES

3 > BOOKS CONTINUED

of our universal preference for that which is simply easy on the eye. One comes away feeling that we humans are a ruthless, superficial species. Various chilling case histories are cited: When



Laetitia Casta:
at the top of the
genetic heap.

abused children in California and Massachusetts were studied, it turned out that a disproportionate number of them were unattractive. "This wasn't because they were badly groomed or bore unhappy facial expressions than other children," Etcoff writes. "Rather, abused kids [had] head and face proportions that made them look less infantile and less cute." But it's just adults who prefer cuties. Another study found that even infants respond more favorably to attractive faces than unattractive ones. Mostly, though, Etcoff confirms the unbearable truth: that we assume that beautiful people are inherently good, and that people are more likely to go out of their way to help them or, in the

case of Natalie Imbruglia, give them an album contract.

The book is full of fascinating cultural-specific obsessions. We learn why blond, light-skinned models are prevalent in Brazil (colonialism), and that there is nothing new about the American fixation with large sex organs. "In the 1930s," Etcoff writes, "mannequins were imported from Europe and came in size small, medium, and American according to the size of the genitalia." Indeed, there are hardly any new beauty fetishes. When Napoleon met with Tsar Alexander of Russia to discuss European politics, "the two ended up talking about cures for baldness." And blonds have been in style for so long that even

ancient Egyptians wore gold wigs.

Etcoff suggests that we "need to understand beauty in order to not be enslaved by it." And indeed, we are deeply puritanical on the topic: We resent natural, unearned beauty, but not nearly so much as we do the artificial kind. Why? Because it practically everyone slams Courtney Love for her plastic surgery? Recently, Love revealed that her nose job "was the best thing I ever did. After that my life was just a lot better because the human response when you walk into a room is just one thousand times better.... Nothing's gonna mar you or get in your way." *Survival of the Prettiest* proves that Love isn't evil at all, but a pragmatic gal acting on a simple scientific fact. ■

1 > MOVIES CONTINUED

faces, absurdly more mature than the Spice Girls' target demographic—wave their arms over their heads in union, just how the assistant director showed them. A pathetic fake orgasm. When the Beatles sweat under very real stage lights, crackling high notes in "She Loves You," masses of hysterical teenage girls (and a young Phil Collins if you look closely) lean out over the balcony, drowning out the music, screeching with whip-pan hot orgasmic tears—paul yes john yes she loves you yes yes panting exhaustion yes squeal george yes yes yes! A Dionysian moment. Ecstatic, orgasmic. Totally real. Truly amazing.

THE KIDS IN JEANNE AND THE PERFECT GUY COMMUNICATE IN STALE sound bites and cheeseball pop lyrics, but they do it with a skip and a smile, an absurd hyper-sincerity. A throwback to *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, Jacques Demy's kickass, color-coded 1964 musical romance, *Jeanne* is the perfect late-'90s porno film.

No one in this movie can sing, but they do anyway. A plumber sings about what's



French kiss: Jeanne and her HIV+ Perfect Guy.

clogging the pipes. An immigrant bookseller sings about the delights of reading. The title's Jeanne (Virginie Ledoyen) collects boys—the yuppie office manager, the hunk (for a French kid) messenger, half the guys on the street—and sings about falling in love with *The Perfect Guy*. That Perfect Guy (Mathieu Demy, son of Jacques) falls for Jeanne, singing her a happy, happy puppy number—about the day he found out he was HIV+.

The songs in *Jeanne* and *The Perfect Guy* aren't very catchy. The French can be pretty spotty at that whole music thing. But director Olivier Ducastel and writer Jacques Martineau have shamelessly captured (or is it recaptured?) a hokey springtime vitality. What a breath of fresh air. ■



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MOVIE > *The Corruptor* (DIRECTED BY JAMES FOLEY) Danny Wallace (Mark Wahlberg), a white NYC cop who requests a Chinatown assignment, is ridiculed for having "yellow fever." Rogue hero/lightly crooked cop Nick Chen (Chow Yun Fat) takes him under his wing. Soon after, they save each other's lives, visit some hookers, shoot guns with both hands, face off against each other. *The Corruptor* is all about struggle—between good cops and bad ones, between rival Chinatown triads, between loyalty and self-interest, between Wahlberg's bulging pecs and his hyper-soft-spoken delivery. Despite the gritty Chinatown setting and some slick moves by Chow, this is pretty familiar stuff. It's notable, however, for being the first post-*Saving Private Ryan* film to attempt that four-dimensional sound-design thing. LOUIS GERALD

<< Chinese takeout: Mark Wahlberg and Chow Yun Fat walk the streets of Chinatown.

2 > TELEVISION CONTINUED

(Mackenzie Rosman), none of whom are able to transcend the impediment of being written like lost Olsen twins. Still, it's refreshing to see a show that isn't all-knowing and dripping self-awareness from every pore. The Camden kids may come off like dolts, but, unlike the constantly emoting Dawson's crew, you don't feel like slapping them every ten minutes.

"The show has some of that quality of a funny morality play," says Brenda Hampton, the ebullient woman who created *7th Heaven* and executive produces and writes the majority of the episodes. "I don't know if there is a

family like this in America. I don't know if there was a family like the Cleavers, but I think that you don't mind spending an hour of your time with them." Hampton finds criticism of *7th Heaven* (of which there is much) uperious, especially the notion that she has deliberately foisted the least-cool teens in a generation upon an unwilling public. "They are not uncool! Didn't you see when we had Peter York from the Monkees on? Didn't you see Keith Allison from Paul Revere & the Raiders? Am I wrong? Are they not cool?" On the plus side: Patch Adams has yet to make a house call. ■



BOOK > *The Fires* by RENÉ STEINKE (WILLIAM MORROW) In Steinke's debut novel, the heroine of *Firestarter* is all grown up, and though she still looks like Drew Barrymore, she's lost her telekinetic edge. No problem for this postpubescent pyro: Matches and gasoline are always nearby. Steinke (full disclosure: She's the wife of Spin Executive Editor Craig Marks) isn't interested in updating Stephen King but in mapping the horror of being stuck in a northeast Midwestern town and trying to get over dominating parents. As Ella sleeps around and burns down buildings, Steinke evokes her shaky mental state in almost surreal detail, noting, for instance, burn marks on Ella's arms that are "a line like a piece of barbed wire." Then the story explodes in a cinematic finale that's every juvenile delinquent's dream. AL

5 THE MIX DELIVERING THE WORLD IN 323 WORDS OR LESS

Street Kingdom [book]

Subtitled *Five Years Inside the Franklin Avenue Posse*, this book is really about the astonishing relationship between a white journalist and a Brooklyn gang member/rapper trying to go legit. (Warner Books)

Popped [Web site]

Hyper hi-lo music crit site. (www.popped.com)

Funny Games [video]

Two German kids with no moral conscience but a highly developed sense of sadism terrorize an Alpine resort. Hilarious. Numbing. (Fox/Lorber)

Nitro [Web site]

The complete story of misunderstood hair-spray rockers Nitro doesn't disappoint. (home.dti.net/ianc/nitro/nitro.html)

You Are Here [graphic novel]

The plot of Kyle Baker's latest is a cross between *After Hours* and *Escape From New York*. A not entirely successful experiment in computer-assisted illustration. (Vertigo Comics)

Monkey.org [Web site]

Internally clanched Web community made by people who own way too many computers. Might be a cult. Bizarrely cool. (www.monkey.org)

The 24 Hour Women [movie]

A workaholic TV producer gets pregnant, starts to understand child abuse. Rose Perez stops screeching, tries to act. (*Shooting Gallery*)

The Cheater's Handbook [book]

Lots of dirty tricks for advancing in school, politics, etc. Spin in no way whatsoever, you know, condones this book or suggests you should ever cheat or anything. (ReganBooks)



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SERF AND TURF

LANDS OF THE LORE (WESTWOOD STUDIO)

Before Diablo and Zelda made sword-and-sorcerer games cool, there was *Lands of the Lore*, a Dungeons & Dragons-style fantasy epic that wowed gamers with its vivid, highly detailed medieval battlegrounds. In this, the third installment of the early-'90s classic, you play Copper LeGre, nephew of King Richard, who is also the bastard son of a plebeian Dracoid serving wenches. Complicating matters further, a band of saber-toothed warthogs have just purged your father and brothers, and, oh yeah, they've also stolen your soul. Now you've got to reclaim your spirit while protecting the hamlet of Gladstone from utter destruction. Although ostensibly a role-playing game, *Lands of the Lore* doesn't have a multi-player option. Instead, you enlist allies from a group of computer-run characters, who, according to the games' developers, are all the help you'll need. No matter. The pumped-up, specially designed 3-D warres would probably clog Internet pipes anyway, making it tough, if not impossible, to render, say, the lush curves of an arctic barbarian lass. And how much fun would that be? DAVID KUSHNER



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QUESTION: WHY "FLY," WHY NOW?
BY CHRIS NORRIS** photographs by MARK ALESKY

WHITE PUNKS ON DOPE





You can go your own way. Dexter Holland preaches to the disenchanted masses.

He may be dumb, but he's not a dweeb. Bryan "Dexter" Holland strides manfully to the edge of a New York City stage, and—holding two cans of beer—launches himself onto a sea of hands. His goal: to carry said beverages back over the thirty-looking crowd and deliver them to the band's soundman some 20 yards away. "I'd done it before," the Offspring's 32-year-old singer says later. "But this was going to be the record for distance."

Barely ten feet into the crowd, the horizontal Holland loses the beers—seized and guzzled by fans. Then he loses his shoes. Then his socks. Then he simply disappears, leaving his beanie-clad aide-de-camp, guitarist Kevin "Noodles" Wisserman, squinting out from the stage. After a good five minutes—"It was definitely the record for time," Noodles reports—Holland reemerges from the club's antechamber, barefoot.

"That'll teach me to try that with a New York crowd," he yells.

On a dime, L.A.'s platinum mosh engine jumps back into its chief metier, the action-packed set of speedy thrash numbers and novelty rock songs. It's reccom-hardcore in the '80s West Coast tradition: breakneck tempos, rubber masks, a Larry "Bud" Melman cameo—fun, fun till your daddy takes the beerbong away. While the gigantic hooks of hits like "Self Esteem" and "Come Out and Play" stoke the crowd, an undeniable part of the thrill comes from that combination of self-consciously sophomoric attitude and gleeful loathing that American punk rock perfected.

"You know what?" Holland tells the crowd. "I hate the Backstreet Boys!" The testimony gets a roar of approval and the Offspring tear into the fast-and-loud "Cool to Hate," a ditty that professes distaste for cheerleaders, jocks, geeks, trendies, freaks, Doc Martens, muscle tees, TV, and, while we're at it, "you." Then, after a pause, guitar-tech/percussionist Chris Higgins tape one of the baby doll heads that trigger his sampler and there's an eejit-Offspring moment. Def Leppard counts "Gunter, glieben, glauben," disembodied hootchie-mamas leer "Give it to me, baby," and the band locks into the funk-grunge groove of its MTV smash "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)." What may have begun as a send-up of a white wannabe B-boy comes off here—four samples, three power chords, and one heavy-rotation video later—as a hard-rock salvo against all things "jiggy." The crowd loses it.

Suddenly, out pops 18-year-old Guy Cohen—the kibbutz-born ensat playa from the video—and fans surge the stage. A sublimely gawky teen actor, Cohen's got moves for days. "I do the Running Man, I do the Roger Rabbit," he says later. "I get down and freak the ground—oh, man, people just explode!" And explode they do as he pulls his leg back behind him, freakin' it dorkstyle. Cohen has had to bring his own security to Offspring shows and was even chased through the streets of New York earlier today. He finishes his routine with a statement of rockist affiliation—a stagedive—leaving fans to wonder whether they've just witnessed a retrenchment of rock values, some new multiethnic youthcool, or both. "Thank you, New York," says Holland after the encore. "Now where are my fucking shoes?"

THE OFFSPRING ARE THAT PUZZLING ANOMALY OF 1999: AN ALTERNATIVE-ROCK band that sells. It was one thing for such a species to thrive in the early '90s, when anything loud and acuzzy in a Melvins T-shirt seemed state-of-the-art. It's quite another for them to suddenly pop up between 'N Sync and Jay-Z, yelping wiiecracks over music redolent of Bud and ahog carpet. In a year when fabulous postpunk from the Smashing Pumpkins to Hole failed to capture the mass imagination, here come four 30-ish guys in bowling shirts with their fingers on the pulse of young America.

Somewhat, in the middle of impeachment season, Noodles's ragged guitar and Holland's treble rants have struck a nerve—possibly a deep one. When the Offspring broke in 1994, punk purist critics wrote them off as hopelessly pop—neither "challenging" nor "dangerous"—more soundtrack music for extreme-sports videos. But now with their fifth album, *Americana*, the Offspring have a hit single that actually flirts with one of the last dangerous topics available to a bunch of SoCal whiteboys: race.

The song "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)" portrays a white kid who "ain't cool but fakes it anyway," i.e., acts black. "It's really inspired by wannabe gangsters," Holland says. "Guys who go to malls and get the gangsta rap clothes. Guys on Ricki Lake who won't listen to their momma."

It's a fairly showpony motif—a staple of daytime TV and Jennifer Love Hewitt movies—but the music takes it in all sorts of new directions. The track ranks the band's first hit, "Come Out and Play," through the MTV Jams machine. It mixes Latin percussion and ghetto-girl voices. ("We wanted a Rosie Perez type," Holland says; they settled for two

voiceover pros, one of them Welsh and seven months pregnant.) It throws samples at aggro guitars, and features quasi-rap verses that show the rhyme skills you'd expect from someone named Dexter (e.g., "He's not quite hip / But in his own mind he's the deepest trip"). The mix is explosive. Even more so when bolstered by the McG-Directed video, which, like an earlier *Monster Magnet* clip, both lampoons and exploits the whole hijiki, dancing-girl overlkill of late-'90s rap videos. Wickedly appropriating hip-hop sound and image, "Pretty Fly" sends up way more than just white wannabes. It takes a longtime villain of the Offspring oeuvre—the "trendy asshole"—and locates him in the dominant trend of the moment, which happens to be African-American.

Rest assured, most of Holland's bile is directed at bands like 'N Sync and the Backstreet Boys, with their mall-friendly bleaching of street style. "I mean these groups make Hanson look like Rancid," Holland says. "I really do hate that stuff. Buff white guys singing slow jams." Holland actually likes some rap—Ice-T, N.W.A., Public Enemy, the Beastie Boys—and is careful not to be misconstrued as anti—hip-hop. "I really didn't want [the song] to be a black/white thing because that wasn't exactly the issue," he says. "It's definitely part of it, but it's more about posseurs of any kind."

Guy Cohen, who beat out *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* regular Seth Green for the role of the guy in the video, says, "I'm sure lots of people see the video and go, 'Dang, that guy's cool.' I was watching MTV, and one of the 'N Sync guys had the same Fubu jersey I wore in the video. The Offspring didn't even realize it, but we were making fun of the biggest teeny-bopper group there is."

"Pretty Fly" is a reaction, Tom Calderone, senior vice president of music and talent at MTV, says more generally. "The Offspring were able to take hip-hop, an incredibly strong musical force, and comment on it on so many different levels. It's a great reflection of where the times are at right now." And where the times are at right now is boy groups, Jewel, and most of all, R&B—things not rock. Cast your mind back 20 years and you'll realize the Offspring's latest gesture is quite familiar: It's a cry from the marginalized white rock sector against an ascendant culture of urban fakery: Poseurs! Trendies! Wussified Phonies! What we may have here, ladies and gentlemen, is the great premillennial Disco Sucks song.

CHRISTMAS IN ORANGE COUNTY. A HOLIDAY STAMPEDE AT DISNEYLAND JUST SENT several people to the hospital and the malls are almost out of Furbys. Past a traffic-choked strip mall and down an industrial parkway we find Nitro Records, indie punk label and unofficial HQ of the Offspring. Inside, Christmas carols play on the odies station and friendly young men and women wearing Doc Martens and Vans sit typing or stuffing envelopes. A framed photo of the Nitro-sponsored West Corona Little League team shares wall space with posters for Social Distortion and the Damned.

Holland and Offspring bassist Greg Kriesel started Nitro in 1995, and the label is currently home to such neo-punk upstarts as Guttermouth and the Vandals. Their posters fight for attention with ten old-school videogames: *Defender*, *Asteroids*, and other classics occupy the adjoining hallway, next to T-shirt boxes and instruction cases. Upstairs, Holland's office boasts campy executive touches: a huge tropical fish tank and one of those desk ornaments with the hanging silver balls that click back and forth. "I'm really into office toys," Holland says, setting the spheres in motion. As the balls click away, the men of Offspring sit back and reveal the weighty global vision behind the album *Americana*.

"Actually, we were going to title it *You're Too Fat to Make Porn*," says Noodles.

"That was right off of *Springer*, I think." The 35-year-old guitarist has a black-dyed, rectangular haircut and super-thick glasses, very Metal Shop Teacher circa 1978. When a caller to a radio show asked him what superpower he'd most like to have, Noodles answered, "I'd settle for some decent eyeight." His T-shirt says WHITE TRASH under a turnpike-sign-style silhouette of a trailer.

Holland sits across from him, his long legs splayed out on either side of the chair. Shorn of the corromos Courtney Love once dubbed the "worst hair in

"WE WERE GOING TO TITLE THE ALBUM YOU'RE TOO FAT TO MAKE PORN," SAYS NOODLES.

Ron Weitz (above), Noodles (right), and Greg Kriesel (opposite): the Offspring guys live more like successful software entrepreneurs than rock stars.







Hear him roar: Holland is a sworn enemy of dumb-ass trendiness.

rock." Holland has a spiky blond Billy Idol-ish crew cut and ice-blue eyes, lending him a slight resemblance to the toothy actor Gary Busey. Even in silver creepers, he is so clean-cut and all-American-looking the nickname "Skippy" seems as apt as "Dexter."

"It wasn't like we sat down and said, 'Okay, we want to make this really cool social statement,'" Holland says in a twangy SoCal accent. "We'd done a few songs—"Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)," "The Kids Aren't Alright," "Why Don't You Get a Job"—then we realized a theme. It was more of a passive thing."

Befitting its earlier title, *Americana* is a spirited harangue on deadbeat roommates, psychobabbling girlfriends, felonious buddies, trendy tattoos, four-by-fours—the whole morass of tacky, polyglot American culture as experienced from a suburban sofa. In the title track, Holland sings that his nightmare is coming true: "Where culture's defined by the ones least refined." In the *Jerry Springer*-ishly titled sing-song "Why Don't You Get a Job," he sings, "She sits on her ass / He works his hands to the bone." In "She's Got Issues," he bemoans a girlfriend who "thinks she's the victim but she takes it all out on me." It's the cry of the alienated white dude and—to a sizable demographic—it rocks.

Gathering in Holland's office, the members of *Offspring* seem to represent that demo quite successfully. Kriesel, the skinny, short-haired former high-school trackmate of Holland, has a quiet intensity and, according to Guy Cohen, "always looks like he's studying for finals." Ron Welty, the sole member without kids, is also the one with the most pronounced surfer drawl. He is only five years out of his job at a frozen yogurt shop. While *Smash*'s 5.3 million sales have bumped them up several tax brackets, the four have lives befitting modestly successful software entrepreneurs more than rock stars. Instead of lavish chalets, Holland and Kriesel put their first royalty checks into starting Nitro. Holland recently got a single-engine plane, but he still drives the same 1979 Toyota truck the band toured in a decade ago. Kriesel has the *X-Files*-ish habit of "investigating crop circles." Noodles and Welty like to snowboard. They all seem very much like the smart, middle-class suburban kids they were two decades ago—in some cases, disturbingly similar.

Holland, for instance, nurtures a perverse interest in entry-level employment. He's applying for a job at McDonald's. "I think it would be a great experience," he says, seriously. He rifles through some papers and finds the application form, partially filled out. Next to NAME, hand-printed block letters say "Dexter Dufresne"—a fake surname. At ARE YOU 18 OR OLDER? it reads "Yes." ARE YOU LEGALLY ABLE TO BE EMPLOYED IN THE U.S.? "Yes."

"[POLITICAL CORRECTNESS] GETS TO THE POINT WHERE YOU WANT TO MOVE TO MONTANA. GET AN ELECTRIFIED FENCE AND A SHOTGUN."

TWO MOST RECENT JOBS: "Rock Star," says Noodles, laughing, "and Student."

All four *Offspring* members have done their time in academia, although former class valedictorian Holland is probably the most schooled—just a dissertation away from a molecular biology Ph.D. at USC. This is hardly a contradiction, with everyone from Bad Religion guitarist Brett Gurewitz—head of *Offspring*'s former label, Epitaph—to Descendents singer Milo Aukerman having done some form of postgraduate work. In fact, Holland's school years indirectly provided the *Offspring* with song fodder. When he wasn't cloning viruses, Holland was living in South Central: eating tacos, witnessing drive-bys, and cruising the freeways—finding in L.A. dystopia he later made radio-friendly.

The freeway shooter in *Smash*'s "Bad Habit" was "basically me talking about my old car," Holland says. "I had a 1980 Chevette that wasn't really able to reach freeway speeds. As soon as I hit the on-ramp, I'd floor it, and by the time I hit the freeway, I was going about 45. It was flipped off like once or twice a week. I think it was kind of in my mind, getting revenge." The album's hit "Come Out and Play" was inspired by the violent high-school gangbangers he'd seen in South Central. In Holland's hands, however, these inner-city snapshots came off like a Wild West suburbia. This transmogrification proved to be a crucial element in the *Offspring*'s success.

While "Come Out and Play"'s clipped bursts of rhythm and sound-bite showed a subliminal rap influence, rock guitars and Holland's high-pitched recess yell made the whole thing total teenybopper rock: raw and candy-coated at the same time. That the exact same mix'n'match technique made "Pretty Fly" a hit in an utterly different musical environment suggests that the *Offspring* have developed something very much like a magic formula: Take a Latin-rock classic—War's "Low Rider" in the case of "Come Out and Play"; Santanna's "Oye Como Va" in "Pretty Fly." Put butch metal guitars over it. Add some catchy vocal sound bites. Mix into bite-size chunks. "I like the idea of combining different elements," says Holland. "You just start building in stuff."

Herenin lies the sweetest irony of these authors of "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)." Their piecemeal song construction is right from the sampler age. They load their songs with percussion and rhythm. They have catchy sound bites and vocal trade-offs. Their lyrics are precise and realistic. They even sold more than five million records on an independent label. Minus a few crucial details, the *Offspring* are a rap group.

The whitest rap group ever. Dave Jerden, the band's producer since *Ixnay* on the

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DEXTER WANTS FANS TO "LIVE LIFE ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU THINK IS THE RIGHT WAY TO DO IT."

Hombre, explains the Offspring's mass appeal in terms of sonics and demographics. "Dexter" got the classic South Bay voice," he says. "It goes back to Jan and Dean and the Beach Boys. The South Bay is a real whitebread place and all the bands—from the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean through Social Distortion and the L.A. punk thing—they all have that voice." Jorden calls it a "melting-pot voice," and traces its unique timbre and dialect back to a postwar migration from points all over the United States to Orange County. "It isn't a Southern sound, it isn't a New York sound," he says. "It's a sound that you can't quite put your finger on, but it comes from the whole country."

IF ORANGE COUNTY IS A MELTING POT, YOU'D NEVER KNOW TO LOOK AT IT. IN FACT, the region tends to specialize in certain extremes. In the '80s, for instance, Orange County enjoyed an unusually harmonious relationship between subculture and mainstream: It was home to both Reagan nuts and surf-Nazi skinheads. In the front seat of a Mitsubishi Montero, Holland sips some gourmet coffee as we cruise past points of local interest. We make a right on a street called Heil. "Like Heil Hitler," he cracks. "Appropriate for this place."

We drive past fitness centers, ocean inlets, and mini-malls—"the cornerstone of Orange County life," Holland observes. Then we pull into Garden Grove, a pleasant neighborhood of Mike Brady homes, each barely ten yards apart. The occasional trailer or mobile home sits alongside El Caminos and Toyotas. This palm-tree-lined neighborhood is where Holland, Kriessel, and Noodlen grew up punk.

The first record Holland ever owned was the Jackson 5's "Dancing Machine." The first he ever bought was the Flying Lizards' art-punk single "Money." Shortly thereafter, his older brother brought home a punk compilation produced by KROQ's DJ Rodney Bingenheimer and Holland's extracurriculars were decided. "Black Flag, the Circle Jerks, the Adolescents," Holland remembers. "I just loved many rock fans who name their first concert experiences as Kiss or Meat Loaf, Holland names his as 'probekid caravans or Miss S. Shebeen,'" friends in a local punk bar he viewed as "beckboard caravans."

One night in 1983, Holland and his high-school track buddy Kriesel went to Irvin to see a Social Distortion show. The concert was oversold and prompted a riot, leaving them with nothing to do but scan beer and hang out at a friend's house. Peeing in the bushes, they decided to form a band. "I'm like, 'Well, I'll play guitar,'" Holland says. "And Greg was like, 'I'll be bass.'" Months later, they enlisted Noodles, who couldn't play guitar but was old enough to buy beer. He was locally known as the school's custodian. "To us, he was always this guy sweeping up wearing a Descendents T-shirt," says Rick Shipler, now a Nitro employee. Welty joined soon after and the line-up was solidified. Keeping with the punk tradition of wacky nicknames—Lee Ving, Darby Crash—Bryan Holland took the name of Dexter and the band chose the name Offspring, showing more than a slight debt to the Descendents. They recorded their first 7-inch and pressed a thousand copies of it under the made-up label name Black Label, "because that was the beer we were drinking maaaaaaassively at the time."

For some reason, songwriting duties had fallen to Holland. "See, when you start a punk band you gotta do about three or four obligatory songs," Holland recalls. "First the anti-cop song. Then the anti-war song. Then the death song. And then the alienation, my-girlfriend-is-a-bitch song." Holland started with the cop song, a little number called "Police Protection." "It was probably way-influenced by the Dead Kennedys at that time." He tries to remember more lyrics. "It was something like, 'Smash heads, oet touch, don't take any sh!t.' I dunno, something about doughnuts."

By the time the Offspring got started, magazines like *Flipside* and *Maximum Rock-n' Roll* had begun to form a politburo of what was and wasn't punk. The scene became smaller and its borders more rigidly policed. When the Offspring played with so-called peace punks Final Conflict, the club was rushed by skinheads, who, after all, were ideologically opposed to peace. "And Noodles," Holland says with a laugh, "being the peacemaker that he is, tried to say 'Can't we just all get along?'" Getting between the two groups, he was stabbed in the shoulder.

Now a full decade into it, the Offspring's faithfulness to their hardcore origins seems distinctive. While their oft-gimmicky studio construction blends well with the rap age, their sense of tone and form comes straight from the L.A. tradition of snide sideling, *nu*-edge



like the Adolescents, Suicidal Tendencies, and the Angry Samoans. Instead of spooky poetry about heart-shaped boxes and black hole suns, Holland's songs concern subjects straight from a passed study-hall note. "I think part of the reason people identify with what we're doing is because I write songs about regular real things," Holland says as we drive past a former heavy-metal venue, now a strip club opened by porn star Jenna Jameson. "I guess you could say the same thing about Bruce Springsteen, but I don't understand that guy at all." Plus Springsteen doesn't use words like "rad" and "dweeb."

This is a big theme in the Holland oeuvre: personal responsibility. A song like 'She's Got Issues' is saying, 'Hey, come on, let's just take some personal responsibility for who we are,' he says, "instead of blaming our actions or behavior on things that aren't really relevant."

...
Holland he fingers psychobabble and recoveryspeak for some of this moral laxness, isolates another cause: "political correctness." "It's gone so far now that it's almost stilling. A lady says McDonald's because she spilled coffee on herself, because the cup didn't say THIS COFFEE'S HOT. The street I grew up on had, like, one stop sign when I was a kid. Now there's four stoplights in a hundred-yard distance. That kind of gets to the point where you want to move to Montana or something. Get a mobile fence and a shotgun." Before I can suggest the nickname Dexter McLevings, Holland sees himself shot.

"Of course, there's a flip side," he says. "I mean, it's great that you can express what you think. We have more freedoms than anywhere in the world."

Holland, a registered Democrat, denies any reactionary affiliations. He's pro-choice, pro-environmentalism, and even enlisted erstwhile mayoral candidate Jello Biafra for a guest rant on *Key*. "If there's one kind of unifying theme to our music," says Holland,

"it's that you should live life according to what you think is the right way to do it." All righteous sentiments. Not that the Offspring are taking anything too seriously. An extended "dance" version of "Pretty Fly" was offered to rap stations. Their Christian concert for L.A.'s K-Rock featured dwarves dressed as Santa's elves, a New Wave medley, and a rendition of "Pretty Fly" starring the most notorious pretty-white guy in history, Vanilla Ice. "He's like William Shatner now," says Higgins. "He's like, afraid to fuckin' poke fun at himself." Neither is the Offspring, a group formed under the strict conservatism of mid-'80s punk, pushily curving in a world of Boyz

"Kids come up to me—really young kids—and go, 'This is my first concert ever,'" says Noodies. "This is my first time I ever went in the stem pit.'" He laughs. "Initially it rubs you as kinda weird. It makes you feel like you're the New Kids on the Block. But then you think, actually, it's pretty cool, you know? Hey, there's a lot worse things." ■

For Offspring soundings, previous and intermission, log on to SPINonline

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HOT-TUB ORGIES & KUNG FU BEATDOWNS:

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE HIP-HOP SKIT

BY MIKE RUBIN AND CHARLES AARON photograph by JAMIL GS

Masterpiece Theater: O.T. (Original Thespian) Prince Paul pioneered the hip-hop skit.





THE PLAYA'S THE THING: THE MOST POPULAR DRAMATIC ELEMENTS OF THE HIP-HOP SKIT

SETTINGS:	WALK-ON CHARACTERS:	CONFLICTS:	ACTIONS:	SOUND EFFECTS:
The 'hood	Cute foul-mouthed l'l kid	Parody (film, radio, newscast, infomercial, awards show)	Shooting/getting shot	Breaking bedspreads
Housing project	Playa-hater	Orgy/ménage à trois	Having sex	Moaning
Playground	Recent immigrant	Disorder in the court	Demanding oral sex (female)	Slurping
Sidewalk	Nave teacher	Immigrant encounter	Receiving oral sex (male)	Spanking
Classroom	Racist/doughnut-eating cop	Message from the Beyond	Drinking alcohol	Flushing toilet
Courtroom	Goofy white guy	Financial dispute	Smoking marijuana	Funny voices/foreign accents
Bedroom	Shallow white girl	Male-female beef	Taking a bath	Inclement weather (thunder, rain, wind)
Bathroom	TV studio announcer/radio DJ	Drug deal	Taking a dump	Wailing sirens
TV studio	Sheepy teacher	Avenger/hend's death	Resisting arrest	Hovering helicopters
Radio station	Prostitute/pimp	Betrayal by friend/business associate	Being on trial	Pearls
Hospital	Crackhead/pothead/drunk	Prank call	Praying/preaching	Squealing tire
Doctor's office	Drug dealer	Phone call from jail	Beatdown	Airplane lift-off
Psychiatrist's office	Judge	Celebrity answering machine message	Drive-by	Life-support machine
Prison	Demented doctor/shrink	International conspiracy	Kung fu fighting	Bullhorn/police radio
Church	Nagging girlfriend		Canckering	Pounding fists
Funeral home	Sleeper		Being executed	Prison-door slamming
Subway train	Chris Rock			Crackling electric chair
Automobile	Donald Trump			Gunshot
	God			Explosions
	Satan			Children playing

As the bard Geddy Lee once observed, "All the world's indeed a stage and we are merely players, performers and portrayers," and nowhere is that bit of wisdom truer than in hip-hop. Just as the DJ scratch cut and the for-the-ladies love ballad were once hip-hop album staples, the melodic intro, the slapskate interlude, and the pseudo-comedic skit are currently as de rigueur as sneaker product-placement. Back when producer Prince Paul orchestrated the game show send-ups on De La Soul's 1989 debut, *3 Feet High and Rising*, the notion of skits seemed amusing and even groundbreaking. "At the time," Paul says of his innovation, "there were so many MCs coming out that you really didn't have a feel for what they were about. So I put skits throughout so you'd get more of a sense of their personality and feel a little closer to them."

Creating disturbing scenarios of racist cops, drive-by murders, and the occasional blowjob, West Coast dramaturgs Dr. Dre and Ice Cube soon adapted the skit to convey lurid social commentary. Back on the East Coast, RZA brought staged interludes to his many Wu-Tang Clan-related projects to augment the music's cryptic, cinematic feel. By the mid-'90s, skits mainly seemed like pointless sidebar fun. Today, whether it's rappers flexing their actorly chops in a kung fu beatdown interlude or just testing their stand-up material in a hot-tub orgy scene, there are so many bits of extraneous dialogue on albums that it's often downright annoying. "I hate the fact that a lot of MCs think they have to have them," says Prince Paul. "They don't have an idea of what they want to do, so a lot of stuff you listen to is just a waste of time. At least make people laugh or think or something."

The relentless proliferation of skits is the inevitable result of hip-hop's long-standing obsession with Hollywood. As such rappers as Ice-T and Tupac Shakur made the leap from the mic to the big screen, hip-hop became the Schwab's lunch counter of the '90s. Soon, hopeful SAG members ranging from Nas to DMX began using their audio performances as calling cards to nab movie roles. Of course, the ultimate goal is to direct, and the next to follow Ice Cube (*The Player's Club*) and RZA (*Bobby Digital*) to the director's chair is skitmaster Prince Paul himself.

"I always wanted to do a movie," he says, "but I didn't know how to go about it, so I figured I'd do it on wax first." He calls his brilliant new album, *A Prince Among Thieves*, "the skit to end all skits"—a movie soundtrack complete with dialogue but without an actual movie to accompany it. (The film is in the proverbial "preproduction" stage.) Trying to combine *Sleeper* and *Juice*, Paul presents the raga-to-bitchita saga of an aspiring rapper whose quest to raise money to finish his demo tape plunges him into an underworld of back-stabbing buddies, corrupt cop, and gangland kingpins who moonlight in rap management. With supporting roles by De La Soul, Everlast, Biz Markie, and the ubiquitous Chris Rock, *A Prince Among Thieves* is the most ambitious and fully realized dramatic attempt of hip-hop skitdom, making this the perfect time to survey which productions were the bomb and which just bombed.

THE ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

Founder/Director: Paul "Prince Paul" Huston

Overview: As the aphorism goes, tragedy is easy—it's comedy that's hard, and producer Prince Paul's deft touch with the mirth button makes him a rarity among hip-hop's drama kings, although he's equally good of sinister and creepy. Arguably the first to do full-blown skits, Paul is the definitive master of the form, the most technically accomplished and nuanced skitmaster around. He pioneered the skit-as-running-motif—including *De La Soul Is Dead's* road-along storybook on "WRMS" radio station goals; the skin-driven concept album (*his solo debut, Psychoanalysis*); and, with the recent *Prince Among Thieves*, the album-length skit.

Featured Performances:

De La Soul, "Intro," 3 Feet High and Rising (1989)

Scene: First instance of the "game show parody," complete with cheering studio audience and cheesy organ theme. With De La as contestants, the emcee quizzes the MCs: How many feathers are on a Perdue chicken? How many fibers are intertwined in a Shredded Wheat biscuit?

Motivation: To introduce the group as thoughtfully irreverent yucksters you could take home to steppin'.

Dramatic Range: Joke, joke, joke! Posdunes, Mase, and Trugoy try on funny accents, Kansan, Australian, and Strong Islandese.

Key Line: "I like Twizzlers, and I like the alligator bob, and my favorite drama movie is *Blood Sucking Freaks*, just like your mama." (Posdunes)

3rd Bass, "Flippin' Off the Wall Like Lucy Bell," The Cactus Album (1989)

Scene: Prince Paul's would-be jesters-in-training give the gasface to blue-eyed soulisters such as Tom Waits, with MC Serch crooning "When I was a li'l baby boy...I was blessed with soul" in his best Satchmo impersonation.

Motivation: To paint themselves as "downer" than other goofy white guys appropriating black music.

Dramatic Range: Serch and his studiomates can't keep from cracking up, although the joke's not particularly funny.

Key Line: "He got soul, comin' out his asshole." (MC Serch)

Gravediggaz, "Diary of a Madman," 6 Feet Deep (1994)

Scene: Disorder in the court as the group go on trial for what can only be assumed are grisly killings. The four defendants plead insanity—naturally—claiming they're possessed by demonic spirits. Despite the MCs' rhymed testimony, the judge finds them guilty as charged.

Motivation: To prove the legal system hasn't improved much since Salem.

Dramatic Range: The courtroom scene is mixed seamlessly in and out of the raps for a nimble cross-examination effect; anguished wails of the victims' families add

- 3RD BASS**
1 MC Serch
DE LA SOUL
2 Trugoy
3 P.A. Peasemaster Mase
4 Posdnous

- N.W.A.**
5 Ice Cube
6 MC Ren
7 Easy E
8 Dr. Dre
9 DJ Yella

- 10 Snoop Doggy Dogg



to the overall ghoulishness.

Key Line: "Trust me guys, it's all under control. The judge is my uncle, he'll take the insanity plea—oh yeah, don't forget my retainer balance." (defense attorney)

Prince Paul, "Beautiful Night (Manic Psychopath)," Psychoanalysis (What Is It?!) (1996)

Scene: In a shrink's office, a young sociopath matter-of-factly recounts his previous evening's activities—raping his dinner date, killing a racist bartender, and snapping the neck of an overzealous mosher at a Beastie Boys show. This skit/song hybrid is just one of several "conversations" with a shrink (whose Viennese-accented replies come courtesy of an old self-help record) on Prince Paul's underrated solo debut.

Motivation: To throw the mental health field the biggest curveball since penis envy.

Dramatic Range: The emotional detachment of the confession adds to the skit's unnerving quality, which is only abetted by the melodic backup singers cooing "It's a beautiful night for a date rape, it's a beautiful night for a kill."

Key Line: "I wasn't wrong for that shit, was I, Doc? This type of shit happens every day in the ghetto, Doc. You should come on down and hang out." (patient)

THEATER FOR THE NEW GANGSTA

Founder/Director: Andre "Dr. Dre" Young

Overview: Dropping the surgical mask of his first troupe, the World Class Wreckin' Kru, Dre went on to create some of the most controversial theatrics in hip-hop history (drive-by's, prostitute murder, etc.). Drawing from blaxploitation flicks, Iceberg Slim, Prince Paul, and Public Enemy, he ruthlessly melodramatized the West Coast gang milieu. Dre's star player was Ice Cube, who split after a dispute over money and recorded a series of solo records full of helicopter chases and McDonald's drive-thru cockups. (Cube later focused on movie roles and made his directional debut in 1998 with *The Player's Club*.) Edward G. Robinson—warbore Easy-E took over as Dre's sympathetic sex-and-violence-monger after Cube left—until the arrival of lanky Clint Eastwood lookalike Snoop Doggy Dogg. As Snoop once rhymed, "With so much drama in the LBC..."

Featured Performances:

N.W.A., "Fuck tha Police," Straight Outta Compton (1989)

Scene: In this seminal example of the "courtroom disorder" conceit, prosecuting attorneys' Ice Cube, MC Ren, and Easy-E present a case against the LAPD to "Judge" Dre. Mid-song, evidence is presented in the form of violent, apparently random busts of Ren and Easy.

Motivation: To place N.W.A in direct conflict with the goons of the LAPD, and to portray Compton as a lawless ghetto Ponderosa where residents and cops scream "motherfucker" at each other.

Dramatic Range: Fading in and out of the skit after each MC's verse, Dre maintains both the courtroom concept and the song's momentum. Like the best of his interludes, it's both witty and thoughtfully hateful.

Key Lines: "The jury has found you guilty of being a redneck, whitebread, chicken-shit motherfucker!" (Dre); "Fuck you, you black motherfuckers!" (police officer)

N.W.A., "Just Don't Bite Me," 100 Miles and Runnin' (1990)

Scene: After Easy-E receives an unsatisfactory blowjob, a goofy white TV announcer broadcasts an infomercial for N.W.A.'s instruction manual, *The Art of Sucking Dick*. On the group's next album, *Efil 4-Zaggin*, further oral sex instruction leads to gang-rape fantasies and the murder of a "ho."

Motivation: To suggest that N.W.A. are amoral psychopaths who view sex and murder as equally pleasurable outlets for black male frustration.

Dramatic Range: Frighteningly believable.

Key Line: "Haa this ever happened to you? Does her teeth get in the way while she's sucking your dick?... Well, I had that same problem, until my bitch went out and

bought N.W.A.'s new book..." (TV announcer)

Ice Cube, "A Gangsta's Fairytale," AmeriKKKa's Most Wanted (1990)

Scene: A goofy white guy welcomes you to a playground in the "black part of the city," where a scuffle is in progress. Police drive up and Ice Cube obliges a concerned shorty by reciting an X-rated nursery rhyme. Note: first instance of "if I kids" trend, i.e. children spouting obscene and/or tendentious sentiments.

Motivation: To prove America's youth want to be corrupted.

Dramatic Range: The kid is a pistol, and as in most Dre-derived interludes, the atmosphere is fairly authentic. Cameo'd by Bugs Bunny and Andrew Dice Clay.

Key Line: "Yo, Ice Cube, man, why you always kicking the shit about the bitches and the niggas? Why don't you kick some shit about the kids, man, the fuckin' kids?" (lil' boy)

Dr. Dre, "\$20 Sack Pyramid," The Chronic (1992)

Scene: Dre kicks back with a bottle of Crazy Horse to watch this local-access spoof of *The \$20,000 Pyramid*. Contestants Duck "Muthafuckin'" Mouth and Booty Lee Farmaworth play for a \$20 bag of weed and a \$35 gift certificate to the Compton Swap Meet.

Motivation: To slyly attack Dre's enemies via the game-show format.

Dramatic Range: Contestants are bawdily convincing in an Amos 'n' Andy sort of way. **Key Line:** "All right, y'all bitchies got 30 seconds to answer five motherfuckin' questions." (game show hostess)

Snoop Doggy Dogg, Intro to "Gz and Hustles," Doggystyle (1992)

Scene: Elementary school classroom where substitute teacher Mr. Buttworth asks the children what they want to be when they grow up. One answers "fireman," another "police officer." Sitting in the back of the room, Snoop answers a bit less conventionally.

Motivation: To reveal Snoop as a product of his criminalized ghetto environment even before he added gin to his juice.

Dramatic Range: The early-learning scenario is evoked with loving detail, like *Sesame Street* gone to pot.

Key Line: "My name is Snoop...and I want to be a motherfucking' hustler, you better ask somebody!" (lil' Snoop)

THE NOT-READY-FOR-PRIME-TIME PLAYAS

Founder/Director: Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs

Overview: Hip-hop's supreme drama queens, the Bad Boy posse are Harlem exchange students of the Dr. Dre school, lounging around a ghetto soundstage of their own creation. But, unlike Dr. Dre's gangstas, Puffy's plays actively seek your sympathy, coming across as the brand-conscious montys/lovers-next-door. In their deathly, skin-heavy oeuvres, Puff and B.I.G. battle envious "playa-haters" and "bitches," endure inclement weather, and constantly talk to God about their inner demons.

Featured Performances:

Notorious B.I.G., "Intro," Ready to Die (1994)

Scene: Portrait of the artist as a young play: We follow our hero from delivery-room spank (*Puffy* creepily appears as the "father") to parents arguing to subway pickup to release from prison. Song snippets accompany each life-change, from "Superfly" to Audio Two's "Top Billin'."

Motivation: To depict Biggie as the hip-hop generation's purest product—lisp, jail time, and all.

Dramatic Range: A brash badass talking trash under a dark cloud of vulnerability.

Key Line: "Nigga, it's '87, nigga. Is she dead broke? We need to get some motherfucking' paper, nigga!" (Biggie)

Notorious B.I.G., "#1 Me (Interlude)," Ready to Die (1994)

Scene: Conventional game of hide-the-bone, except Biggie spoofs himself as the

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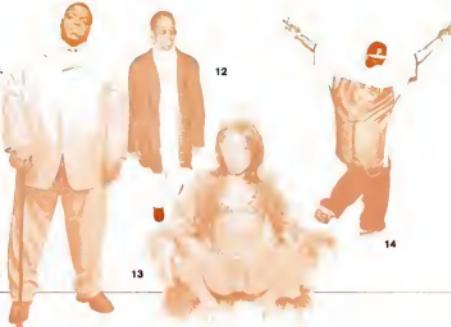
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- 11 The Notorious B.I.G.
 12 Puff Daddy
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 14 Mese



A CONVENTIONAL GAME OF HIDE-THE-BONE, EXCEPT BIGGIE SPOOFS HIMSELF AS THE OVERWEIGHT LOVER HEAVY B., GETTING SO INTO THE ROLE HE LAUNCHES HIS PARTNER OFF THE MATTRESS.

overweight lover Heavy B, getting so into the role that he launches his partner off the mattress and onto the floor. She makes a Jenny Craig joke; he grunts, "I'm sorry."

Motivation: To reaffirm that the bigger the cushion, the sweater the pushin'.

Dramatic Range: The squeaking bedsprings are a riot—if obviously faked, but the woman sounds like a total pro. Underplaying smartly, Biggie never stoops to issue pimp-daddy orders, letting her do the talking (a hip-hop rarity).

Key Line: "Fuck me, you black, Kentucky Fried Chicken-eatin', you motherfucking gangsta-killa! ...chronic-smokin', Oreo cookie-eatin', pickle juice-drinkin'...Slim Fast-blended, black greasy motherfucker! Oh, Biggief!" (woman)

Puff Daddy, "Life After Death Intro," Notorious B.I.G.'s Life After Death (1997) and "No Way Out (Intro)," No Way Out (1997)

Scene: Over melodramatic strings, guitars, piano, flatline beeps, sirens, and helicopters, Puffy preaches to the void.

Motivation: A rather lifeless appeal for immortality. Not so much prescient (considering B.I.G.'s shooting death in late '97) as dangerously self-aggrandizing. The message: We shall tempt death and live to sip Cristal another day.

Dramatic Range: Puffy?

Key Line: "Please, Lord, forgive me for my sins, and protect me from evil. For thou art the Kingdom, the Power, and the Glory, for now and forever." (Puffy)

'Lil' Kim, "Intro in A-Minor" and "Take It," Hard Core (1996)

Scene: Unnamed schmo catches a cab to a porno theater (tipping the immigrant driver poorly, resulting in profanity) and satisfies his need to flick staring—you guessed it—the Queen B@#*%. Later, Biggie, Junior M.A.F.I.A.'s 'Lil' Ceasar, and Tri\$ discuss the finer points of male-female relations—oral and anal.

Motivation: To establish the plucky, sweet-faced Kim Jones as the nastiest freak of this week or any other, and to portray the men in her life as no-lucky-lucky Neanderthals.

Dramatic Range: Suitably tacky, with Kim generating considerable comedic heat.

Key Line: "That bitch is on some eat-pussy shit, yo, and I'm not trying to fuck with that, kid." (Tri\$)

Mase, "White Girl" and "The Conversation," Harlem World (1998)

Scene: Working the phones like a tireless telemarketer, Mase chats up two jungle-feverish, "Omigod" valley girls ("Where all the abandoned buildings are?" they coo of Harlem, "Cool"), then gets caught up in a booty-call-waiting predicament.

Motivation: To tweak the voyeurism of goofy white fans, and gently spoof his own lightweight Lothario image.

Dramatic Range: Mase?

Key Line: "Who the fuck is Lisa? Motherfucker, you must have lost your mind... The real nigga I wanted was Puffy, but he ain't come to the club that night, fool!" (call-waiting gal)

And the "Life Imitates Art" Raspberry goes to:

The Madde Rapper, Life After Death, No Way Out, etc. (1998)

Scene: Puffy production apprentice Deric "D-Dot" Angeletti goes "undercover" as an agitated and unrecognized playa-hater MC who respects the Bad Boy crew's success and appears on a series of TV show skits deliriously pleading his case. Back in the real world, when Spin affiliate Blaze printed a picture of the Madde Rapper, Angeletti and his posse brutally assaulted Blaze's editor-in-chief.

Key Line: "They got mermaids swimming in their living rooms and shit like that, you know what I'm sayin'? This nigga is dancing in the rain with kids climbing up mountains and shit..." (Madde Rapper)

THE METHOD ACTORS

Founder/Director: Robert Diggs as RZA (a.k.a. the Abbott, Bobby Digital)

Overview: The Clan's theatrical tastes must run to the avant-garde, because their narratives are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to follow; the only thing that's usually

clear is that pot is being smoked. Just like the Hong Kong action films the group adores, the mumbly Wu dialogue seems to have been dubbed from another language. Skits veer between life-killing atmospherics and chaotic tumult, and as a result, the action usually seems disorienting and directionless. The message: Violence and death are around every corner, and hey, could somebody pass that blunt?

Featured Performances:

Wu-Tang Clan, Intro to "Wu-Tang's 7th Chamber," Enter the Wu-Tang (36 Chambers) (1993)

Scene: As one of Method Man's friends grills him about a missing John Woo video, someone bangs on the door to announce that a neighbor has been shot. After some debate, several Wu-bangers apparently head out "to get busy," perhaps to avenge the murder; this is possibly a prelude to a shooting that later introduces "Tearz."

Motivation: To demonstrate the random violence that afflicts Staten Island's Park Hill projects, as well as the glaring need for a neighborhood Blockbuster video outlet.

Dramatic Range: Ensemble acting effectively captures the inertial dynamic of group decision-making, as the discussion over whether or not to exact vengeance disintegrates into idle chatter.

Key Line: "Is he fucking dead? What the fuck you mean is he fucking dead, God? The nigga laying there with...all types of fucking blood coming out of his head." (Raekwon)

Raekwon, Intro to "Can It Be All So Simple (Remix)," Only Built 4 Cuban Linx (1995)

Scene: Raekwon informs Ghostface Killah that another dealer is working his turf. The duo confront the rascal, slapping him until he opens his hand to reveal the unidentified contraband. Suddenly, five gunshots ring out and Ghostface is hit. Just who shot who is unclear—could this be a setup?—but Ghostface instructs Raekwon to dispose of the goods before the authorities arrive.

Motivation: To prove there's no such thing as a free market.

Dramatic Range: Raekwon's dispassionate delivery subtly hints at the possibility of a double-cross.

Key Line: "Yo, son, I'm hit... Niggas tryin' to assassinate me." (Ghostface)

O'l' Dirty Bastard, "Intro," Return to the 36 Chambers: The Dirty Version (1995)

Scene: An awards-show speech—how's that for foreshadowing?—with O'l' Dirty playing the roles of both emcee and honored MC. The skit quickly becomes a vehicle for a showstopping stream-of-consciousness rant, culminating in the crowning of Blowfly: "The First Time Ever You Sucked My Dick."

Motivation: To prepare the world for the most shameless scene-stealer since Jim Carrey.

Dramatic Range: Dirty unveils a dizzying array of characters, ranging from sub-Urkel nerd to sobbing Pyreoreque ham, leaving your jaw hanging open before the album really begins.

Key Line: "Remember the time when I told y'all when I got burnt by gonorrhea? Yeah, well there's a new bitch, goddammit. Bitch burned me again with gonorrhea." (MC)

Method Man, "You Play Too Much," Tical 2000: Judgement Day (1998)

Scene: Chilling in Brooklyn with Prince Paul, Chris Rock plays an absurdly amped-up announcer giving Method Man a ludicrously lengthy and hyperbolic introduction.

Motivation: To puke fun at the multiple-monikered Meth, whose list of aliases is longer than O'l' Dirty's rap sheet.

Dramatic Range: Rock gets so overheated he almost toeses his own salad, while Meth sulks at a slow boil.

Key Line: "Ladies and germs, get ready for the Ticalion Stallion, a.k.a. Johnny

- 15 RZA
 16 Method Man
 17 Tupac Shakur
THE FUGEES
 18 Lauryn Hill
 19 Wyclef Jean
 20 Pras Michel

"IT'S ABOUT
 NIGGAS AND BITCHES,
 POWER AND
 MONEY, RIDERS AND
 PUNKS." (TUPAC)



Blaze...a.k.a. Mr. Hankey...a.k.a. Mr. Tibbs...a.k.a. Marla Gibbs...a.k.a. Jo Jo Dancer...a.k.a. Donna Brascos...a.k.a. Donny Most...a.k.a. Donny Omondini!" (Rock)

CARNIVAL CRUISE DINNER THEATER

Artistic Directors: The Fugees (Wyclef Jean, Lauryn Hill, Pras Michel)

Overview: With grandiose concepts and flamboyant overacting, the Fugees assume the roles of hip-hop crusaders—their second album, *The Score*, is even presented as a sort of anti-blaxpolitation soundtrack. They spoof Wu-Tang's ghetto swordplay and West Coast gangsta violence, and also attempt to deflate ethnic stereotypes by inflating them into ridiculous proportions with mixed (and often borderline offensive) results. Whether it's Blunted on Reality's bit about a street-corner freestyler who causes a police-car crash or Wyclef's persecution complex on his solo debut, *The Carnival*, the Fugees always go over the top trying to impart a "lesson."

Featured Performances:

The Fugees, "Outro to 'The Beast,'" *The Score* (1996)

Scene: Wyclef and Pras go to a Chinese take-out joint and belligerently demand chicken wings. They end up in a confrontation with the proprietor, a Mortal Kombat caricature who gives them the 411—"Obviously, the two of you are just bitch-ass nigga"—before delivering a martial-art beatdown.

Motivation: To spotlight the mistrust festering between African-Americans and Chinese-Americans ever since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar was killed by Bruce Lee in *Game of Death*.

Dramatic Range: Purely absurd, but some listeners were alarmed by the Asian-American store-owner character.

Key Line: "You think I open restaurant in the middle of the 'hood and don't know what's going on? I fucking represent." (restaurant owner)

Wyclef Jean, "Intro/Court/Clef/Intro (Skit/Interlude)," *The Carnival* (1997)

Scene: A fake movie trailer hyping the album—complete with guest-star sound bites from the entire Refugee Camp—suddenly and inexplicably segues into a courtroom full of diverse ethnic caricatures. Wyclef is then tried by the U.S. government for being a "player" and a "goddamn revolutionary."

Motivation: To paint Wyclef as a misunderstood visionary, even before he started waving guns at insensitively reverent magazine editors.

Dramatic Range: The United Nations Security Council as played by the Jerky Boys. The Chinese consulate could once again lodge a complaint for accent abuse.

Key Line: "All rise for the honorable Judge Bartholomew Holdanigadown the Third." (baillif)

Lauryn Hill, "Intro," *The Miseducation of Lauryn Hill* (1998)

Scene: The school bell rings and a teacher calls roll, over a backdrop of soft guitar and murmured voices. As the album continues, we periodically revisit a vintage New Jersey classroom, where the lesson is the album's theme: What's the meaning of love? The only absentee is the miseducated Ms. Hill.

Motivation: To dramatize Hill's disillusionment with pop-culture's debased values.

Dramatic Range: Slightly rendered, with class discussing pop songs (Kirk Franklin, Whitney Houston) and movies (*Titanic*) that offer florid, unrealistic visions of romance. **Key Lines:** "[W]hat sounds nice might not always be right for you." (student) "Yeah, we need to put you on a bullhorn and let you ride around Newark." (teacher)

THE ACTORS STUDIO

Starring: Tracy Marrow as Ice-T; Tupac Amaru Shakur as 2Pac (a.k.a. Makaveli)

Overview: Although Ice proves a charismatic presence in such films as *New Jack City*, *Trespass*, and the NBC series *Players*—well, maybe not *Players*—on his albums he acts as if he's frozen stiff. Consider the intro to 1988's *Power*, in which he supplies both voices in

a "conversation" between two rap fans who battle to the death over an advance tape of Ice's album. Despite possessing considerable acting skills, fellow SAG card holder Tupac confirmed his CD dramatics to overblown song intros, often using a harmonizer to deliver portentous "voice from beyond" sermons that, given his tragic demise, would be downright eerie if they weren't so cheesy.

Featured Performances:

Body Count, "Smoked Pork," *Body Count* (1992)

Scene: Ice and a buddy fake a flat tire as an excuse to approach a police car. Ice asks for help, but the lazy white patrolman (also played by Ice) rudely reffums him and returns to eating doughnuts. Ice, evidently not a Knipy Kreme stockholder, shoots the officer when he suddenly recognizes the rapper as America's favorite "Cop Killer."

Motivation: To present Ice-T as the ultimate rebel without a cause, willing to kill a law enforcement official simply for eating a pastry.

Dramatic Range: Once again, Ice provides multiple voices, with little success.

Key Line: "Right now my job is eating these doughnuts...hey, wait a minute, aren't you..." (police officer)

Makaveli, "Intro," *The Don Killuminati: The 7-Day Theory* (1999)

Scene: An inept newscaster announces that Tupac's new album will cause industry insiders to rearrange other artists' release dates lest they suffer a "wipe-out in retail interchart movement," whatever that means. The reporter adds that other rappers, including "Notorious P.I.G.," are conspiring against Tupac and his Death Row label. Tupac then releases a "statement," i.e., a confusing rant punctuated by gunfire.

Motivation: To prove nobody can keep Tupac down—he'll keep on releasing weak albums from the grave!

Dramatic Range: Tupac sounds as acarily paranoid as ever, displaying a quick-trigger temper that would have served him well if he'd lived to star in John Woo films.

Key Line: "It's not about East or West—it's about niggas and bitches, power and money, ridders and punks. Which side are you on?" (Tupac)

STAR TURNS

The Hardest-Working Man in Skit Business: Busta Rhymes. From beatdowns to immigrant encounters to millennial rants, Bus-a-Bus is trying, but he lacks direction.

Worst Oral Sex Dialogue: Noreaga, "Hed Interlude," *N.O.R.E.* (1998). "Suck my balls, yo! Squeeze my sac, yo!"

Most Miserable in a Period Drama: Nas, "Intro," *It Was Written* (1996). With slavery-era rednecks whooping and whipping it up. Nas delivers a wooden Nat Turner soliloquy, "Hey, damn these chains, man!"

Most Perverted Running Skit: Dr. Octagon, Dr. Octagon, Dr. Octagon (1996). A deranged, sex-obsessed doctor from the future-past puts hip-hop on the couch and under the knife.

Answering Machine Achievement Award: Pras, "Phone Interludes," *Ghetto Supastar* (1998). More than 17 minutes of "supportive" messages (everyone from Donald Trump to Elvie Costello), seemingly recorded at gunpoint.

Best Prank Phone Call: TLC, "Sexy Interlude," *Crazysexycool* (1994). TLC's Chilli calls a confused suitor (Puffy), and seductively asks for his help: [moaning] "I want you...to pass me a tissue...so I can wipe...my...ass!" [toilet flushes]

Most Pointless Sex Scene: Big Punisher, "Taster's Choice," *Criminal Punishment* (1998). Slutty and banal three-way with Big Pun and two morenas exploring all inputs.

Best Gangsta Send-Up: The Coup, "Pimp's Freestyle" at the Fortune 500 Club," Genocid and Juice (1994). Posing as waiters, MCs Boots and E-Roc dispense with two millionaires who impress their date by pretending to rap. Memorable quote: "Fuck now, I ain't got no Grey Poupon."

Most Butt-Obsessed Interlude: Kwest Tha Mad Ladd, "A Day in the Life of My Aspirine," *This Is My First Album* (1996). From morning constitutional to prison "invasion," Kwest gives new meaning to "booty call." ■

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I should have come as no tundras-crunching surprise to Paul Westerberg when the office of the new governor of Minnesota invited him to sing at the inaugural ball. The 38-year-old Westerberg is the great white rasc of the mighty fine, you betcha, lute-fish-venerating state. And the gov, well, he probably didn't remember it, but he had already met Westerberg years ago. At the time, Jesse Ventura was a pro wrestler stretching out his career with a heavy metal record, and Westerberg was singing with the Replacements. The Replacements were strictly amateur wrestlers, beer-drinking, wisecracking indie rockers in the pre-Nirvana '80s who fiestailed across shows and albums loaded with, among a great many things, Westerberg's anti-anthems. Early in

their career, both they and Ventura were recording for Minneapolis's Twin/Tone label.

The irresistible farce collided with the immovable Body one day in the record company hallway. "Buncha skinny rock'n'roll guys going one way, and big Mister Wassler coming the other," Westerberg says today with a laugh. He can laugh today, because for once the notoriously smartass Replacements managed to muffle themselves and avoid a grudge match they probably wouldn't have survived. "This was back in the time when he wore the scarves and the earrings and shit. He definitely acted like he wanted to kill all four of us."

Westerberg ducked that fight, and eventually he escaped the hold the Replacements had



HOW PAUL GOT HIS GROOVE



on his life, too. It's taken two post-Replacements albums in the '90s for him to figure out how to grow up, but his new one, *Suicide Gratification*, is a surprise that gives itself away from the jump—it's an utter surrender to adulthood and relative normalcy. "How am I looking? I don't want the truth / What am I doing? I ain't in my youth / I'm past my prime, or was that just a pose / It's a wonderful lie, I still get by on those," he truth-tells on the album's opening track, a triumphantly bittersweet tale of a guy who no longer flinches when he looks in the mirror. "You're my latest last chance," he pleads to a woman in "Final Hurrah"—and he's been to the ledge so many times he knows all the pigeons by name. "I used to struggle with depression," deadpans Westerberg, "but about three years ago I stopped struggling."

His previous two records, 1993's *14 Songs* and 1996's *Eventually*, were universally described as "solo albums"—they fell under the long shadow of the Replacements, whose woozy din and tenderness changed the lives of their fans ("all four of them," snorts Westerberg). *14 Songs* officially shifted the emphasis from rocker to songwriter, but it sat there like an eight ball in the throat of a viper, indigestible, stuck trying to please those who expected the familiar bash-crash, while stumbling toward craftsmanship. Westerberg was doing it the Rod Stewart way—but if the Replacements were a brilliant Midwestern Faces, Westerberg solo was far too complicated, too insecure, to build himself up as *Lad Alone*. *Eventually* just seemed hummmed, unhappy with the old stupidification, unhappy with



WESTERBERG BACK

ON HIS CLEAR-EYED NEW ALBUM, THE ONETIME BASTARD OF THE YOUNG MAY HAVE FINALLY LAID TO REST THE BEERY MEMORY OF THE LATE, GREAT REPLACEMENTS. BY RJ SMITH photographs by KATHARINA BOSSE

itself. I ask Westerberg if he was upset at the paltry sales of the his solo stuff.

"I was just...disappointed," he says. "I was disappointed in...the way my clothes looked on me. Depression kinda took over that tour. I smelled the first whiff of 'I've done this before, and I don't know how much I love doing this anymore.' I started to get a George Thorogood vibe. That crack in the armor started a whole lot of soul-searching."

Maybe watching fame come and go to fellow homeowners Soul Asylum cracked that armor some more. After *Eventually*, Westerberg backpacked to Minneapolis, had a son with his wife, Laura, and began writing songs that weren't trying to rally old Replacements fans; those fans had grown up, stopped going to clubs, and got on with their lives, much like Westerberg himself. He claims he doesn't know who his audience is anymore, but with *Suicaine Gratification* he's imagining a sizable one, crafting a record that speaks with the clarity of phonics. The self-professed "bad idea whose time has come" is now with a new label (Capitol), and on *Suicaine* he hired venerable West Coast studio cats like Jim Keltner and Benmont Tench, who know how to give a songwriter cash on the barrelhead.

More than that, he had Producer-to-the-Stars Don Was chauffeuring him to the studio each morning. Westerberg snagged Was, who has freshened up such against-the-grain grown-ups as Bonnie Raitt and Bob Dylan, when the producer innocently invited him to sing a duet with Jewel on her *MTV Unplugged* special. Goshithankabutnooooo, responded Westerberg; I do have some new songs, though. When he sent his demo to Was, the producer was stunned.

"It was the best batch of songs that anyone has ever sent to me," says Was. Once in the studio, "Paul would just disarm everybody from their preconceptions for working with formulas or clichés... I think he was really trying to keep people from being hacks."

Driving around L.A. while Was rolled his eyes and chatted up Garth and Mick constituted a major field trip for Westerberg. He doesn't get out much these days. He hasn't stocked up on any of the youngish singer-songwriters on the scene, and hasn't gone out to hear music in years. What Westerberg does listen to is John Coltrane, the peeling saxophone turned way up, still one more way to keep the world at bay.

"I can't see Paul going to play in some radio station's golf tournament to get his single added to their playlist," says Was. "He's a reluctant to do the distasteful things."

Westerberg might put it a little differently; he might say he wants to make great records and then forget about them. The star-making process has lost whatever allure it once had.

"It's weird," he starts. "You want [recognition] when you're 13 or 14, and you can make it happen when you're in your mid-20s, and by the time you're in your 30s you don't want it anymore. So it's just a matter of finding that next thing that I'll be when I'm 50."

Which is?

"I'd like to start my own language. I've always wanted to do that as much as play guitar in a rock band. I may end up living in some sort of weird commune where I find like-minded people and we shut ourselves off from the world and speak in our own language."

Fifteen years ago, that Shangri-la could have described the Replacements and their ardent fans, shut off from a music mainstream that never quite understood their bond. The songs have changed, but the goals remain the same.

"I'm not ashamed I can't function in society like I'm supposed to," says Westerberg, pride and resignation equal partners. "I don't know what I'll be doing 15 years from now. Just art, I suppose." —

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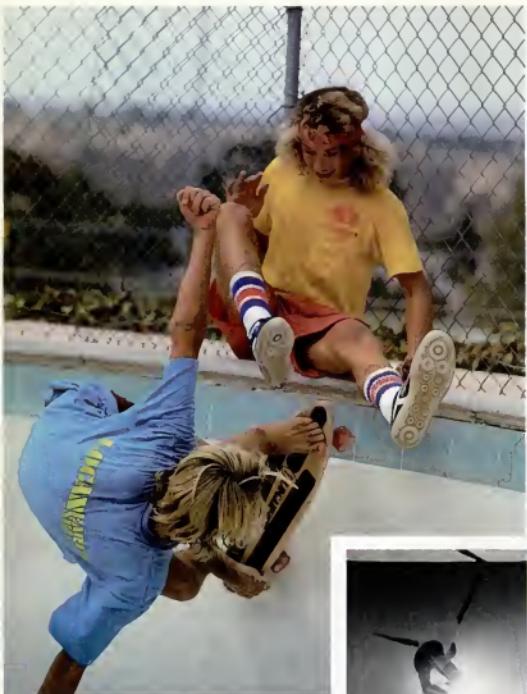
The wondrous properties of centrifugal force:
Tony Alva, above, trespassing on Beverly
Hills's Maple Drive in early 1977. Jay Adams,
left, circa 1977, at Surf de Earth Skatepark.
Both photographs by Glen E. Friedman.

Twenty years ago, you did not drop in on Tony Alva. Twenty years ago, if you found yourself standing next to the volatile, gravity-defying Alva at some crowded backyard pool in the Valley, and he was planning to take the next run—even though he'd just taken the last one—it was best to not even look at him.

Tonight, however, such ancient protocols are no longer in effect. Alva, 41 now, bearded and dreadlocked, has come to The Block, a theme park-size mall in Orange, California, to skate the new Vans Skatepark, an indoor, 46,000-square-foot skateboarding Oz located between a Virgin Megastore and a brewpub. Hundreds of skaters and spectators are here celebrating the park's opening. As a dozen or so mostly teenage skaters stand in an informal line, waiting for their chance to try out the smaller one of the park's two cement pools, they seem wholly oblivious to Alva. To them he's just another skateboarder in baggy jeans and a scuffed yellow helmet. Somewhat older, perhaps, but of no readily apparent significance.

True, a handful of old-school types approach Alva as he waits, tapping his shoulder, talking briefly, paying their respects. But the younger skaters don't really notice these exchanges. They're checking out the pools and the vert ramp and the two areas designed to look like streets in the real world.

As Alva stands poised at the edge of the drop, rocking slightly, his left foot planted on the board that bears



What goes up: counter-clockwise from top left, Tony Alva (with shoes) and Jay Adams (without shoes) at San Diego State, 1976; Nathan Pratt, Sepulveda Canyon, 1975; Stacy Peralta and friends at the Arizona Pipes, 1977; Jay Adams trespassing in West LA, 1977, photograph by Glen E. Friedman; "Mad Dog" Tony Alva wears white fur at Bunker Spreckels's apartment, 1975.



his name, a wispy blond-haired nine-year-old, completely unaware of him, stands in the same position just a few feet away. And when the guy in the pool blows a back-side grind at its far end, the nine-year-old pushes off with his right foot.

It's a moment of minor blasphemy—a nine-year-old, a kid who can barely even skate, dropping in on Alva Alva, the leader of the Dogtown boys, the former World Champion, the godfather of urban skaters who transformed skateboarding from a sport of short little muscular dudes doing noos wheelies into the minor religion that it is today. Does the kid have any clue what he's doing? Any clue at all?

Twenty years ago, "Mad Dog" Alva would have fired his board at the tiny kid's head. But today, he simply claps twice, like a Little League coach, and smiles at all the shorties in line.

"HEY, IS THIS YOUR CARBURETOR?" Tony Alva grew up in Santa Monica, a few blocks from the beach and a failed amusement park called Pacific Ocean Park. In 1958, CBS spent \$10 million renovating the 28-acre park, which was built on a huge concrete-and-steel pier. By 1967, however, the park had been shut down due to poor attendance and soon fell into a state of slow deterioration.

While much of the original SoCal surf culture sprang up around affluent enclaves like Malibu and La Jolla, the Venice/Santa Monica area that Pacific Ocean Park bridged was run-down and gritty. Dogtown, the locals called it. The streets were lined with boarded-up storefronts, liquor stores, and ratty dives, like an under-

ground coke-snorting emporium known as the Mirror Go-Round. The area beneath the pier was even seedier. Junkies shot up there, gay men used it as an anonymous trysting spot, bums established long-term subterranean encampments. But the pier served another function as well: 275 feet wide, extending hundreds of feet into the ocean, it created three separate breaks for the Dogtown locals to surf.

The danger inherent in surfing the P.O.P. pier, with its numerous concrete pilings and crowded conditions, led to a tradition of intense clanlessness: You had to have confidence in your fellow surfers. Sometimes outsiders were discouraged via an abrupt punch in the face, no questions asked. On other occasions, a local might paddle out to an alien surfer, clutching a carburetor in his free hand. "Is this yours?" he would ask the trespasser, then drop the carburetor into the ocean. It was here, in P.O.P. surf culture, that Alva was introduced to the principles that would later inform the Dogtown skate scene.

They skated O.J. Simpson's football-shaped pool in Pacific Palisades. They skated a magician's rabbit-shaped pool in Santa Monica. One night, they used gas-powered pumps to drain a fireman's pool, then returned the next morning to skate it.

applying their surfing techniques to concrete, riding low to the ground with their arms outstretched for balance, skating with such intensity that they often destroyed their homemade boards in a single session.

"We were just trying to emulate our favorite Australian surfers," Alva says, explaining the genesis of their new low-slung, super-aggressive style. "They were doing all this crazy stuff that we were still trying to figure out in the water—but on skateboards, we could do it."

Three years later, the introduction of urethane wheels resurrected interest in skateboarding. By then, the Dogtown kids had developed an approach to skating that was far more evolved than what anyone was doing at the time. "No one else had that same surf-skate style, because they didn't have banks like that anywhere else," Alva says. "We had this tradition that was unique to our area."

THE IMPORTANCE OF CUSTOMER SERVICE Outside the Jeff Ho & Zephyr Productions Surf Shop, in front of a wall-size mural of co-owner Jeff Ho surfing a wave that was almost pornographic in its perfect, arcing glassiness, Alva and Adams and a few other Dogtown kids were skateboarding back and forth, cutting off cars, catcalling passing girls, staring down all the pedestrians who failed to avoid them—like the two guys who had just rolled in from Van Nuys or wherever, more jock than surfer (but trying hard with their Vans and Hang Ten shirts), who tried to enter the shop's front door. It was locked. They looked at their watches. It was 3 p.m.

Inside, Skip Engblom, one of the shop's owners, sat in a rocking chair, drinking vodka and papaya juice and watching the scene play out. This was one of his favorite pastimes.

"Hey!" cried one of the Van Nuys guys, finally noticing him. "Open up. This door's locked."

"What the fuck do you want?" Engblom yelled back.

"I want to look around."

"If you want to come in here, you've got to give me some money first," Engblom said. "If you just want to look around, go to the fucking library."

"I've got fucking money," the guy said, pulling a twenty out of his wallet and waving it in front of the window. "Let me in and I'll spend it!"

It was an innovative approach to customer service, characteristic of Ho and Engblom's general approach to commerce. The pair had formed their partnership in 1988, when both men were still in their late teens. Ho was a gypsy surfboard shaper living in the back of his '48 Chevy panel truck; Engblom was a vagabond surfer who'd been traveling around the world in an effort to avoid the draft.

Their goal was to be a completely self-contained entity, reliant on no one. To this end, they designed, manufactured, and sold their own surfboards; they created their own clothing line; they produced their own advertising and promotional





movies. Sometimes, however, they would sell other people's merchandise. "We did a lot of stuff that would be considered illegal," allows Engblom. Various wholesalers sold them an impressive array of surfing lifestyle accessories, like 15,000 Quaaludes or vast amounts of fireworks. "Once, we ended up buying a quarter of a barge of firecrackers," says Engblom. "We didn't know how much that was exactly. But the price sounded really cheap."

For the local Dogtown kids, the shop served as a second home. They used to help Ho shape and repair boards in the shop's backrooms in exchange for discounts or free merchandise. At night, the place turned into kind of a speakeasy, over which the charismatic Ho—wearing rainbow-tinted glasses, four-inch platform shoes, and striped velvet pants—presided. Local bands performed, and drugs were dispensed with typical '70s largesse.

With his shop, Ho tried to provide the same sense of family and community that he'd found at the beach as a kid growing up. "I was a loner, this geeky little Chinese runt kid who couldn't play sports until I discovered surfing. And then I saw these other kids, growing up the same way. I mean, who's going to be hanging out all day at the beach? The kids who don't want to be hanging out at home. So, to them, I would say, 'Check it out, this is surfing. If you use your talents, you can make something of yourself.'"

To this end, Ho sponsored two surf teams: one for the area's best surfers, guys who were in their late teens and early 20s, and, in a move that was fairly unusual at the time, one for the younger kids, who were destined to become the next wave of stars. As skateboarding's popularity increased, the junior surf team, which had included Tony Alva, Jay Adams, Shogo Kubo, and Stacy Peralta, evolved into the Zephyr Competition Skate Team—a 12-member group of the best skaters in Dogtown. Ho gave them team T-shirts. "We wanted to give them colors, something to be a part of."

"To wear the team shirt was just unreal," says Peralta. "We were all middle- and lower-class kids, and it wasn't like we had a lot of opportunities. We weren't the kids who were going to graduate as valedictorians or the guys from Palisades driving BMWs to the beach. So to be chosen to be a part of something like that was just the hottest thing that could happen to a kid in that area."



Team spirit: counter-clockwise from top right, Dogtown, circa 1989; Jim Muir riding the original Dogtown Skates board at Carlsbad Skatepark, photograph by Glen E. Friedman; the Zephyr Team stand before the downhill course at the Bahne-Cadillac Competition, 1975; Shogo Kubo, 1979; Paul Craven rides the "Malibu Tube" at Kentier Canyon School in Brentwood, photograph by Glen E. Friedman.

A FUNKY, FUNKY LOOK The Bahne-Cadillac Skateboard Championship, held in the summer of 1975, was the largest competition that skating's revival had yet inspired. The two-day event featured downhill, slalom, and freestyle competitions. The organizers had built a 150-foot-long wooden ramp especially for the competition. More than 400 enthusiasts traveled to Del Mar, California, to attend the championship. "It was the first major contest where skaters from all over county came together," says Paralta. "We came in not knowing anything about the outside world—who else was skating, what their style was like. It was as if we'd evolved in this Galapagos Island vacuum."

The Zephyr team wore uniforms, sort-of-matching Vans deck shoes and blue T-shirts emblazoned with their team name. Even so, the Z-Boys, as they would come to be known, seemed wild-looking compared to the other competitors. Their shoes were torn and scuffed, and their jeans were missing back pockets, the inevitable result of low-altitude power-slides. "Our hair was so long and fluffy that we'd all chopped our bangs off two inches over our eyebrows," says Alva. "It was just a funky, *funky look*." In addition, they carried themselves with an aggressive, streetwise swagger. "We were pretty hard-core when it came to anybody trying to compete with us," he says. "We kind of psyched out everyone there before we even started skating against them."

Skip Engblom, who had dressed for the occasion in his finest beachfront pimp-wear (a long-sleeved purple Hawaiian-print shirt, a snap-brim fedora, vanilla-white dress shoes, dark sunglasses, a black briefcase), led the team toward the registration table. "We all went up to the table together, shoving people out of the way—a bunch of poor kids with something to prove," he says. "When we finally made it up to the front, everyone was staring at us. 'There's our entries and there's our check,' I told them. 'Where's our trophies?'"

In the competition's first event, the freestyle preliminaries, contestants had two minutes in which to impress a panel of judges with their most creative skateboard skills. At that time, state-of-the-art freestyle was a static, tricks-oriented endeavor: Competitors performed noa wheels while rolling in perfect circles, popped handstands on their boards, or did as many consecutive 360s as they could manage.

The Z-Boys thought that kind of stick-men, tick-tack style was pathetic. And Jay Adams, the team's first member to ride, immediately demonstrated their contempt. Pushing hard across the platform that had been set up for the event, Adams picked up speed quickly, carving back and forth to generate more forward momentum. As he neared the platform's far end, he crouched low, lower than most of the people who were sitting in the bleachers had ever seen anyone get on a skateboard.

The crowd started shouting as Adams pushed closer to the platform's edge—he looked as if he were about to shoot right off. But then he lowered his body even more and pulled a hard, extremely fast turn. The maneuver left his body fully extended, hovering just inches above the platform, with his right arm thrust out for balance and his left hand, palm down, planted on the platform, serving as his pivot. In an instant, he spun 180 degrees and began rolling in the opposite direction, even faster than he was before launching into the turn. The bleachers erupted with enthusiastic, disbelieving cheers. "All the kids just went ballistic, completely out of their minds," says Paralta. "They'd never seen that kind of speed and aggressive style before."

In slightly under two minutes, Adams's explosive performance was over. He hadn't done a single handstand or kickflip. For the rest of the day, while their competitors rolled around the platform like ridiculous, slow-motion, runaway gymnasts, every other Z-Boy proceeded to dazzle the audience. "It was like Ferraris versus Model-Ts," says team member Nathan Pratt.

And it wasn't just the crowd that sensed the discrepancy. For the first time, the Z-Boys themselves began to realize that what had become commonplace to them was actually a revelation to everyone else. "After competing against other skaters, we knew straight out

we were a step above," Alva says. "Our whole approach to the deal was different."

The Zephyr team's routines were so unprecedented the judges didn't even know how to score them.

A GUNFIGHT EVERY AFTERNOON News traveled fast. Within a week of the contest, kids from all over the state were showing up at the shop to see if they could best the Z-Boys. "It was like a gunfight every afternoon of the week," says Engblom. "And the more guys that Tony and Jay and Stacy blew out, the more would show up. One bunch of guys came all the way from Arizona."

Around town, the team's blue Zephyr Competition jerseys turned to gold. Team members called them their "get-laid" shirts. Other kids tried to buy them, and when that didn't work, they tried to steal them. Skateboard magazine started publishing articles about the Z-Boys and Dogtown; photographers became a standard feature of even their most informal skate sessions. Competitions were proliferating, thousands of kids all over the country were buying boards, and suddenly people who weren't particularly interested in skateboarding itself were interested in skateboarders.

"I remember this one girl, she was like, 'I can give the best head in Dogtown!'" Adams says. "But I was just embarrassed by all that fame. Like after I started getting in the magazines, I'd be in a 7-Eleven in the Valley somewhere, and kids would be like, 'Ara ya Jay Adams?' And I was like, 'Nah, nah, that's not me.'"

Alva started hiding his skateboard in the bushes before going to high school every morning. He didn't want to deal with the hype that was developing around him or skateboarding. "I was kind of in my own little world at that point," says Alva. After his early-morning surf sessions, his fingers would be so cold that he could barely hold a pencil during his first-period class. After school, he tried working as a bouncer for a while, but hated all the rules. "At that point, I didn't really have time for anything else. I was just trying to stay focused on what was important to me—and that was every day, every minute, every instant, just surfing and skating."

FLYING LESSONS "Skaters by their very nature are urban guerrillas," wrote Craig Stecyk, an art friend of Ho and Engblom's, who maintained a small art studio at the shop. Stecyk documented and, in large part, defined the emerging Dogtown ethos via the photographs and articles he submitted to *Skateborder* magazine. "The skater makes everyday use of the uselss artifacts of the technological burden. The skating urban anarchist employs [structures] in a thousand ways that the original architects could never dream of." This was a radical notion. Before the Z-Boys, few people had ever thought to skate anything but pavement.

The useless artifact that the Dogtown boys employed most often could be found in the bone-dry backyards of rich SoCal homeowners. In the mid-'70s, the state was in the midst of one of its worst droughts in recorded history, and all over Los Angeles, there were empty pools—in Brentwood backyards, at the secluded outer reaches of Malibu estates, and in the hills of Bel Air, where recent fires had leveled million-dollar houses but left the pools intact.

"Almost immediately after we discovered that you could skate these things, a network of kids developed," says Paralta. "It was like how people will use drugs to attract famous people. These kids would call up the shop and say, 'Hey, we got a pool,' because they wanted us to come out there and skate with them."

In the summer of 1976, every week brought a new pool. There was O.J. Simpson's football-shaped pool in Pacific Palisades, a magician's rabbit-shaped pool in Santa Monica. When a pool grew too crowded or the neighbors started calling the cops too often, they simply found another. Hunting for pools was almost as important as skating them, and the Dogtown boys became obsessed with finding new ones. "I would drive my VVV squareback really slowly down these alleys in Beverly Hills, and Jay would be standing on the roof, looking over fences," says Paralta. They consulted the local real estate listings in the hope of finding unoccupied homes with pools in the back. Out in the Valley, they staked out a firerman's house until they learned his schedule; when he left one night for his 24-hour shift they used gas-powered pumps to drain his pool, then returned the next morning to skate it. Once, Adams and Shogo Kubo paid \$40 to a pilot at the Santa Monica airport for a one-hour ride. "You were supposed to be listening to this guy's pitch for flying lessons, but we spent the whole time looking for pools," he says.

"It became this big, secret, cat-and-mouse-type deal," says Jim Muir, one of the most avid Dogtown pool-skaters. "You'd be sneaking around from your friends, because you didn't want them to know about a new pool because then it'd get too crowded. You'd be sneaking around from the property owners, sneaking around from the cops." They kept lookout posted at strategic vantage points. If the cops rolled up in front of the house, they simply ran out the back. If the cops came from the back as well, then the



Dogtowners went sideways, over fences. Soon, as many as four or five police cars were responding to calls. "The one place where we did get harassed constantly was this abandoned estate in Santa Monica Canyon across the street from [Mission Impossible star] Peter Graves's place," says Peralta. "He'd call the cops on us and we'd climb up into the trees and hide—and they'd be right below us, searching, not seeing us while we were up there. As soon as they left, we'd climb down and start skating again."

When the cops did catch them, they were usually let off with a warning. On occasion, they were arrested for trespassing. That only made them more determined. "The adrenaline rush of jumping over a fence and actually skating in someone's backyard and getting out of there before they came home—that was totally crazy," Alva says. "You can't jump over people's fences in Beverly Hills nowadays. You'd get eaten by a Doberman, shot by a security guy."

Like the schoolyard banks, pools offered a controlled vertical environment that led to rapid innovation; most skateboarders believe that Dogtown is the birthplace of aerials (others claim it was San Diego). "Aerials came from surviving, from being very aggressive and hitting the lip until eventually we were just popping out and grabbing the board in the air," says Alva. "It was something instinctive. Either you made it or you ended up on the bottom of pool, a bloody mess. It happened by total spontaneous combustion. Then we realized that there was an endless array of things we could do."

Photographers like Stevyn Glen E. Friedman (who was 13 at the time) started capturing these revolutionary moves on film. Suddenly, all across America, kids were ripping out the pages of Skateboarder magazine and hanging photos of the Dogtowners on their walls: Tony Alva, flipping off the camera while hanging sideways in mid-air; Jay Adams, his face twisted into a look of the most primal juvenile-delinquent disdain,

told People magazine that Tony Alva represented "everything that is vile in the sport," the new Dogtown style was in high demand across the country. For kids who couldn't quite match Alva's radical athleticism or Jay Adams' spontaneous irreverence, a skateboard or helmet bearing their signatures was the next best thing.

But could you really package the ungovernable energy of a guy like Jay Adams? Could you really turn a kid who barrelled down the streets of West Los Angeles plucking wigs from the heads of old ladies into your corporate spokesmodel? Often you couldn't. In Mexico, where Adams, Alva, and several other Dogtowners had travelled to attend the opening of a new skatepark, the kids who had once emulated their favorite Australian surf heroes now began to resemble rock stars.

"When we got there, this guy told us that if we wanted to score any pot or anything, that they would set us up," says Alva. "It ended up being the cop who brought it to us, this big trash bag full of weed." In the daytime they skated, and at night they partied with grups and trashed their hotel rooms. At a local brothel, a fat, lactating prostitute ardently pursued the 16-year-old Adams. "She just kept chasing him around the room, shooting milk out of her tits at him," says Alva. "We were these full-on little rats in surf trunks who got wild and raised hell, and [skate promoters] just fed off our energy. It was almost like being on tour with Metallica."

As Alva's notoriety increased, he started hanging out with rock stars and wearing white suits and wide-brimmed, pimp-style fedoras. When he and his new friend Bunker Spreckels, a playboy millionaire heir to a sugar fortune and the stepson of Clark Gable, went in search of new pools to skate in Beverly Hills, they hired limousines to chauffeur them.

By 1977, all of the Dogtown boys were prospering. Alva won the World Pro Cham-

"THEY WERE REVOLUTIONARY," SAYS KEVIN THATCHER, PUBLISHER OF THRASHER. "I MEAN, SNOWBOARDING, ROLLERBOARDING, SKYSURFING, EVEN SURFING NOW—IT ALL COMES FROM WHAT JAY AND TONY WERE DOING TWENTY YEARS AGO."

grinding the edge of a pool so hard he actually knocks its coping out of place.

"Rebels have always been popular—but really obnoxious, fucked-up rebels?" asks Friedman, assessing the appeal of these overnight teenage icons. "When girls used to ask Jay for his autograph, he'd draw swastikas on their breasts. He wasn't a Nazi, he just did it to be fucked-up. What the Sex Pistols started doing in 1976, Jay and Tony were doing a year earlier."

"EVERYONE WANTED TO MAKE THEIR MILLIONS" In the beginning, free equipment and the get-laid utility of the Zephyr Competition T-shirts had been reward enough for the team's members. By 1976, however, skateboarding was on the verge of becoming a \$400-million industry. The Z-Boys were getting older; they were graduating from high school and starting to wonder about what bigger, better deals might be out there for them.

Complicating matters were the shop's own growing pains. Ho and Engblom had entered into a partnership with Jay Adams's stepfather, Kent Sherwood, to produce a line of Zephyr-Flex fiberglass skateboards, and the new partners began to have disagreements. "Basically, Kent decided we weren't selling the boards fast enough, so things got kind of weird and crazy," says Ho. "Selling skateboards fucked things up."

"We were still basically kids ourselves," says Engblom. "But all the sudden we were getting orders for 10,000 skateboards, and it was like, 'How do we produce this?'

Ultimately, Sherwood ended his partnership with the pair and started his own company called Z-Flex. As a consequence, Adams and several others team members left Zephyr and began riding for the new company.

In the aftermath of that exodus, Ho began trying to put together a sponsorship deal that would keep the rest of the team together, but he wasn't able to pull it off. Alva left for Logan Earth Ski; Peralta signed a deal with Gordon & Smith. "I tried to get them to see the value of starting as a unit, and ending as a unit," says Ho. "But everyone had decided that they wanted to make their millions."

INTRODUCING TONY BLUETIE One day, the Dogtown boys were sneaking into movie star pools; the next, they were appearing in movies. Tony Alva landed a role in the film *Skateboard* as "Tony Bluetie," a farting, beer-drinking, Playboy-reading skate-thug who ends up losing the big race to Leif Garrett. Stacy Perata, who at 17 was suddenly earning \$5,000 a month from his sponsorship deal with G & S, starred in *Freewheelin'*, a low-budget, cheesy skateboarder romance released in 1976. "I was so embarrassed at the premiere," says Peralta, "that I hid behind a curtain the whole time."

While the executive director of the International Skateboard Association primly

pionship that year. Soon after, he left Logan Earth Ski, and, with the help of an entrepreneur named Pete Zehnder, created his own line of skateboards. (The company's slogan: "No matter how big your ego, my boards will blow your mind.") Peralta left his sponsor to become a partner in Powell Skateboards, which subsequently became known as Powell-Peralta. Jim Muir and another Dogtown local, Wes Humpston—who used to draw on his homemade boards to pass the time while traveling to various akate spots—trademarked the Dogtown name and produced the first line of skateboards to feature elaborate graphics on the underside of their decks. Jay Adams had his signature Z-Flex board and a helmet called the Flyaway. "I made good money off that for a while," he says. "But that only lasted about a year."

"A ROLLING BALL OF CHAOS" In the mid-'70s, Adams and Alva were a step ahead of everyone, pioneers of skating's hardcore approach to life in general. But in the late '70s, the punks caught up. "Black Flag, Circle Jerks, Descendents, Bad Religion, Suicidal Tendencies. We picked up on all the music that was happening in L.A. at that time," says Alva. "There was so much energy at those shows. Skate and punk fed off each other because they were both total outlets for aggression."

Punk replaced Ted Nugent and Jimi Hendrix as the soundtrack for akate sessions; the music paralleled the sessions themselves, which had been turning more and more violent as the Dogtowners' hard-core reputations preceded them. "A lot of people were gunning for us, because they'd read about us in the magazines," Alva says. "We were like a rolling ball of chaos, this mobile gang on a recon mission. We'd show up at a skatepark somewhere, and there'd be guys who'd come up to us and get in our faces, telling us we weren't so hard-core." Naturally, a fight would ensue.

At night, after going to shows for local bands like Suicidal Tendencies (whose lead singer was Jim Muir's younger brother Mike), things got even more violent. "We'd go to parties, take Quaaludes, get in fights with bats and stuff," says Adams.

Drugs and alcohol were starting to exact a toll. Alva's friend Bunker O.D.'d from a combination of sedatives and alcohol, while trying to kick a heroin habit. "We definitely lost soldiers because of drugs," says Alva. "Coke, heroin, downers. People started losing track of what was most important—the skating." Alva was nearly a casualty himself. "I did a lot of coke at that time."

Yet in the early '80s, when bands like Black Flag and the Adolescents were on the ascent, the skateboarding industry was collapsing. Skateparks that had opened just a couple years earlier were already starting to close, unable to obtain insurance or attract enough patrons on a regular basis. The kids who'd taken (*continued on page 147*)

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Photographs by MARTIN SCHOELLER



CIRCUS OF THE DAMNED

Stupid people tricks: opposite page, clockwise from top, Chuckles the Clown, seeking Weenie Men; on Austin local displays her Circus-worthy talent; Molotov Malcontent (in turban) and his "Bunk Bed of Nails"; Dommit the Amazing Wonder Dog, eater of soap bubbles. Above, the Amazing Jericho Reese.



Insane clown posse: clockwise, from top left, Chicken John, bus driver, founder, and ringmaster of Circus Redickules; Jericho Reese and Chicken John perform the infamous "Sea Monkey Tamer" act; the Rev. David Apocalypse, human volcano; Paul the Roadie; Molotov Malcontent lifts an iron on his penis; clown emigres Chuckles, left, and Dr. Ducky Doolittle.

THE CIRCUS COULD NOT LEAVE TOWN. THE BUS BAT-TERIES were dead. While a few members of Circus Redickules milled about on a cold night in San Francisco's Mission District, Chicken John tried to find a jump. Chicken, 30 years old and wearing greasy blue overalls, is loud and foul-mouthed and haas a dimpled grin and a short, stout frame. He's the founder, leader, and ringmaster of Circus Redickules.

Redickules, according to Chicken, is America's largest independent touring circus. It has no funding, no sponsors, no support staff. Chicken John finds the acts, makes the phone calls, books the shows, drives the bus, buys the food, cooks the meals, and drums up publicity. In five days, the circus was supposed to be 2,000 miles away—in Austin, Texas for the first gig in their eight-show "Dia-Ass-Tour."

They were also supposed to have left the night before,

but Chicken needed an extra day to deal with a problem. A week prior, he had used a stolen FedEx number to send out about a dozen press packages to newspapers in the cities where Circus Redickules would perform. FedEx had figured out the scam and pulled the packages. That meant that none of the newspapers knew Chicken John's circus would be in town. That meant no press. And that meant no audience.

At the start of the fifth Circus Redickules tour, everything was going as usual.

BY THE TIME CHICKEN HAD THE 1987 CROWN SCHOOL bus (loaded with luggage trunks, beds of nails, a panel-handling robot, a fire-breathing V8 engine that made blended drinks, and a ratty assortment of cushions) pointed east on Highway 80, it was morning. The rest of the troupe—Insecta, the bug eater; strongwoman

Rominator X; firestarter Molotov Malcontent; the Rev. erend David Apocalypse; mad-scientist Jericho Reese; and Chicken's star, Dammit the Amazing Wonder Dog—started to pack out in the bus's sleeping loft. Chicken, who hadn't slept in a few days, drove. He insisted on driving. As much as possible.

In Circus Redickules's four-and-a-half year history, Chicken John has seen five tours, 181 different performers, and thousands of dollars of debt. When he dreamed up the act in 1994, it seemed like the perfect project. He was a musician burnt out on punk, a New Yorker living in Los Angeles. He decided he would create a "no-talent" circus. "I started the Circus as a result of punk rock being broken, as a monument that punk rock could evolve beyond the mighty three-chord band," says Chicken. "I called it the 'punk rock circus' because punk was all I knew; that's all I'd ever done. I was just doing the new

thing, a new way of annoying people, a new way to have fun at other people's expense."

One of punk's liberating ideas was that you didn't have to know how to use an instrument to play in a band. It was Chicken's intoxicated inspiration that this philosophy could be extended to a circus. He figured his stars didn't really need to know how to perform any acts. Actually, that was better. "The original idea of the Circus Redickuleess was to parody the circus, to blow it out of the water with these ridiculous acts," says Chicken. "It wouldn't require any talent to ape them, but it would be just as entertaining."

In the summer of 1995, Chicken booked a three-week tour from Los Angeles to New York. There were no rehearsals and act lists. There was the Temporary Tattooed Man, the Talking Mime, and the Vegan Geek (who would pull off a head of lettuce and gouge out the eyes of a potato). Some of the acts were terrible: The Amazing Jericho Reese, allegedly a magician, removed his thumb, like a bad clown at a children's birthday party.

Whereas "alternative" circuses such as the Jim Rose Circus sideshow deliver feats of the grotesque, Redickuleess delivered feats of ineptitude. At one show, a performer hot-glued fireworks to a polyester lab coat, lit them on fire, and suffered third-degree burns all over his chest and face. At another, the entire audience walked out during a puppet show staged with undecorated brown-paper-bag puppets. By most standards of professional entertainment, the Circus was so inconvincibly bad that it was offensive, antagonistic even.

Offstage, too, the Circus was rife with problems. One van had a top speed of 35 mph. The Circus would convoy hundreds of miles to get to a show, then find the venue had canceled the gig. The Circus pulled in so little money that the troupe ate dry ramen and beans from the can. (An average take from a show was \$40 to \$80—which would have to cover a three- to five-day supply of food and fuel for 17 people.) After hobbling to the East Coast, Chicken and half the crew got jobs painting parking-lot stripes in New York to earn enough money to get home. Several of the performers, whom Chicken considered to be friends, ended up hating him, accusing him of everything from megalomania to embezzlement. Some clowns threatened violence.

One time out, filmmaker Phil Glau took a video camera along and filmed the chaos for *Circus Redickuleess*, a 90-minute documentary that made the rounds on the

"Hello, and welcome to Circus Redickuleess," he said, upbeat like a tour guide. "We'll be stopped at several parking lots along the tour for your enjoyment. Please, enjoy yourself. 'Hurry up and wait,' that's our motto!"

IT WASN'T QUITE MIDNIGHT WHEN CHICKEN TURNED into a gas station on the outskirts of a small Nevada town skirted by brothels. Two police cruisers crept past the station and checked out the bus and its passengers. The cops eased into the south end of the parking lot—a safe 30 yards from the bus—and parked.

When the bus left the station 15 minutes later, the cruisers sped off in the opposite direction. Chicken watched them disappear in his side mirrors. "They wanted to make sure we kept moving," he said.

CHICKEN SEEMED TO KNOW EVERYTHING ABOUT cops. He also seemed to know everything about bus engines, everything about circuses, everything about punk rock, everything about traveling, and everything about everyone else. "I am never wrong," he once proclaimed.

Chicken grew up John Rinaldi in Newark, New Jersey, the son of Italian immigrants, and moved to Florida when he was seven. By fifth grade he learned that one could walk if he didn't go to school. He began skipping class to work construction, building condominiums.

He somehow finished seventh grade but not eighth. The teachers passed him anyway. He grew before ninth. At 16, Chicken followed his dad up to New York to a job painting the interiors of UPS buildings. One day, a UPS conveyor belt caught Chicken's left arm and crushed it in 17 places. Today, he has 30 percent strength in the arm. It looks like a half-inflated balloon. Chicken wanted to sue, but his dad didn't want to lose the job. "He tells me, 'Stay away, never come back.' Meanwhile, I'm out in New York with one arm. I'm 16 years old and I don't have a coat. I'm freezing. I have no money, nowhere to go. I would spit in the air and catch it for change."

When his Percocets ran out, he found heroin. And when his money ran out, he found an escort service. Chicken eventually cleaned up. He started a successful moving company and an unsuccessful punk band named Letch Patrol. Years later, the business folded when Chicken got nailed for felony tax evasion. The punks ended when he broke up Letch Patrol to play guitar for G.G. Allin. Then he found his best friend Chuck, a Letch Patrol bandmate, dead of an overdose.

ON STAGE, CHUCKLES PULLED A STRING OF PLASTIC SAUSAGES FROM HER ELASTIC SHORTS AND TOOK THE SHORTS OFF. SHE UNSNAPPED HER LEOTARD AT HER CROTCH, LEAVING HERSELF NAKED FROM THE WAIST DOWN. "OOOOH, OOOOH!" SHE SHOUTED. "I'M ON FIRE."

second-string film festival circuit. "I knew it was going to be a disaster," says Glau, "but I had no idea that it was going to be as bad as it was."

IN DIXON, CALIFORNIA, A STRIP-MALL OF A TOWN LESS than two hours from San Francisco, troupe members were occupying themselves by rifling through decks of nudie cards and duct taping them to the roof of the bus. Chicken pulled the bus over, to nap and avoid the morning rush hour traffic in Sacramento. Chicken told Justin Atwood (the Amazing Jericho Reese, who owned the bus) to check the diesel tank with a dipstick, because the fuel gauge was broken.

A few hours later, Justin emerged from the guts of the bus covered in diesel and grease. The 70-gallon tank was empty. There was a broken air hose. Justin stepped into the cab to smoke a cigarette and address the troupe.

It's been the circus ever since. Now, for money, Chicken hustles. He does small jobs, helps out friends, and fixes up cars from the junkyard. He won't touch a straight job. "When I was 12 years old, I could not understand how anyone could go to school. I would rather die; I would rather be beaten; I'd rather go to jail," Chicken said. "And now I'm 30 years old, and I can't possibly see how anybody goes to work."

THE TROUPE WAS EATING HAMBURGERS AND FRIES in a parking lot in Wickenburg, Arizona. Three days out, Chicken hadn't bought any food yet, and Insect and Justin were running out of their own money. The box office from the shows were supposed to pay basic expenses—meals and transportation. During the tour, Chicken hustled and scammed to make ends meet. Most of the costumes came from thrift stores. Half the

food came from a donation box at the previous summer's Burning Man. Nonetheless, nobody made a dime.

After lunch, Paul the Roadie tossed a stick for Dammit. Chicken was talking about terrible performers he'd worked with, but he delivered what could pass for an analogy for the experience of touring with Circus Redickuleess: "Tour is like soup," he said. "You put in all the ingredients and you stir. Sometimes you put Fruit Loops in the soup. They may be no good, but everybody remembers them."

"You fucking never make soup," said David Apocalypse.

AS THE TINY METHAMPHETAMINE TOWNS OF EASTERN Arizona passed by the windows, Molotov thought aloud about booking a small tour of the East Coast with his girlfriend. Molotov graduated from college in upstate New York and figured there was money to be made in some of the smaller towns. "We could get a show in Potdam," he said. "A lot of rich kids go to school there. We could probably play at a frat house."

Chicken looked up from the road and glared at Molotov. "Why do you want to play for rich kids?" he demanded. All conversation on the bus stopped. Chicken answered his question before Molotov had a chance. "Money. Then you spend it. Where's that get you?"

Molotov turned away and stared at the road.

AFTER FIVE FULL DAYS OF DRIVING AND SLEEPING ON the bus, the troupe hit Austin. Chicken drove immediately to a small ranch-style home in the Austin suburbs provided for the ensemble by one of his friends. Two of the more essential members of the Circus, Dr. Ducky Doolittle and Chuckles, had flown in the night before.

David Apocalypse was in the bedroom talking on the phone to local television stations. He told them about Circus Redickuleess and the group's performance later that night. He also said that earlier, when he'd opened the door to the bus, his two pet chimpanzees had darted out and scampered across the street into a nearby park. He told them the circus troupe was currently out in the park searching for the chimps. Apocalypse, of course, had no chimps. He had learned the stunt from his father, a lounge singer who would call newspapers to tell them that his pet monkeys, Be and Bop, had escaped.

The locals bit. Minutes later there were three separate camera crews roving around Northwest Park. "Their names are Helter and Skelter. They're the world's only

Manson-murder-re-enactment chimpanzee act," David told them. "You know, I give them plastic knives and they chase each other around and throw tomato soup at the audience. No one told me that they were going to smoke cigarettes and drink beer."

David, Justin, Paul the Roadie, and Chuckles—with a banana in one hand, a strip of bacon in the other—traipsed about the park, looking up in the trees, and calling for the monkeys. "Helter... Skeler..."

After an hour had passed, one of the camera crews left without a word. The other two reporters asked David if he might be pulling a publicity stunt.

"I wish I was," said David, shaking his head.

SO FAR, CHICKEN HAD LEARNED THAT TWO OUT OF THE eight venues along the tour had canceled, but the Austin show seemed promising. He dressed the stage with



Curtain call: from left, Chicken (with Dammit); "Human Human" Nathan Kichline, who joined the troupe in Austin and left after Houston; Jason, the Dallas promoter; Paul the Rodeo; Ducky DooLittle; Rominator X; Molotov; Chuckles (upside down); Insecta; Jericho Raase; David Apocalypses (with gun).

string of blinking lightbulbs, a plastic clown head, and a wooden calliope box. Austin's nine-piece Brown Whörn band squeezed onto the edges of the stage, leaving enough room for a couple of mic stands and Chicken. He paced about, wearing a dirty black tuxedo jacket, a lavender ruffle shirt, and a pair of black bondage pants.

Chicken and Justin opened the show with what they called "a classic '98 freak show." Chicken barked and Justin came out on cue three times, each in a different costume. For the "Man Eating Chicken" act Justin gnawed on a rubber drumstick. "Stork Man" consisted of Justin standing half-naked on one leg. For the "Sea Monkey Tamer" act, Justin and Chicken enticed the audience to come up close to examine two pink glasses of water, which supposedly held trained sea monkeys. Once the audience members were almost on stage, the pair doused them with the water. "For my next trick, I need a volunteer from the audience," Chicken announced. No takers. "Oh, come on now, don't make me come get you."

A twenty-something guy wearing jeans stepped up to the stage. Chicken pulled a long balloon—the kind clowns use to make balloon animals with—from his pocket. "I'd like for you to inflate it," he said.

The volunteer tried to blow up the balloon.

"I need a hundred-dollar bill from somebody in the audience so that I might perform a magic trick," Chicken continued. "Anybody have a hundred-dollar bill?"

The crowd laughed.

"Anybody have a \$50 bill? I'll give it right back." He paused, then dropped his demand to 20, ten, five, one. "Can I have a fucking food stamp from this fucking shithole town so I can do a fucking magic trick?"

A few kids at the foot of the stage, still wet from sea monkey water, dug through their pockets. Meanwhile, the volunteer held up the limp balloon and asked Chicken for help. "You're going to shut up and inflate it," Chicken said. Chicken snatched a dollar bill from the audience and pushed up his sleeves. He used his

right forefinger to shove the dollar into his left fist. "One...two...three," Chicken said. The dollar was gone. The audience was unimpressed.

"Whatever," Chicken mocked. "There goes the dollar, whatever. Yeah. On the count of three can everyone say, 'What-ever?' One...two...three."

"What-ever," the crowd chanted.

Chicken turned to the volunteer and his limp balloon. "Are you going to blow this fucking thing up or what?" The kid held up his hands.

Chicken grabbed the balloon, blew a one-inch bubble into it, and held it up for the audience. "Now I will lubricate the balloon," he said, licking the long stem. "Now I will lubricate my nose." Chicken spit on his finger and shoved it into his nostril.

He turned sideways and told the volunteer to stick the uninflated end of the balloon into his nose; the air bubble hung from his face. "My lovely assistant will now remove the balloon," he said in a high, nasally voice.

Chicken turned to the crowd and squeezed the bubble at the end of his nose. It disappeared. He bent over, pressed on the back of his neck and looked up at the audience as the bubble of the balloon popped out of his mouth. The volunteer slowly extricated the snort-covered balloon. The audience groaned, then cheered. "And that's the way it goes here at the Circus Rediculuses," Chicken said from the stage. "You have to endure four acts to get one."

FOR THE NEXT HOUR AND A HALF THE TROUPE ALTERNATELY wowed and disappointed the crowd. Insecta dumped a pint of crickets into her mouth, munched a huge, hissing Madegascar cockroach, and washed it all down with a goldfish cocktail. (The crowd: "Yay!") David Apocalypses aware and made escaping from a straitjacket look extraordinarily difficult. ("Enggh.") Rominator X, the strongwoman, smashed ceramic figurines with a sledgehammer. ("Woo!") Molotov walked on glass, swung irons from his ears, and laid down on the bunk bed of nails with

David. ("Ho-hum.") Dammit the Wonder Dog bit at Chicken's ankles and chased bubbles. ("Yeeh!")

Everyone was amitten with Chuckles. In between acts the tiny clown with magenta hair did backbends and cartwheels among the audience, trailing a mess of plastic toys and rubber props. Her act was nothing more than a song: "I know a weenie man / He owns a weenie stand / He sells most everything / From hot dogs on down to mustard / One day I'll share his life / I'll be his weenie wife / Hot-dog, I love that weenie man!"

When she finished the song she ran in place and screamed, "Weenie! Weenie! Weenie! Weenie! Weenie!" She was irrepressible. When she finished the song, everyone cheered. She sang it again and again, until someone from the troupe carried her off stage.

Dr. Ducky DooLittle's act was the complete opposite. Unlike most of the other Circus performers, Ducky has something resembling a life—a career even—back in New York. Five feet tall and 28 years old, Ducky has a pixie's face and the body of a Robert Crumb cartoon vixen. She calls herself a "trackpot sexologist." During the day she writes for porn magazines and poses for titillating, but rarely explicit, photos that accompany them. She also sells her panties at \$50-a-pop via mail order. At night she does performances in which she lectures at New York clubs about copulation. As her alter-ego, Knockers the Klown, she has an act that culminates in her smothering a frosted cake with her ass.

Ducky introduced herself in a vinyl dress and told the audience she was going to talk about the rectum, or more specifically, items that have been removed from the human rectum in emergency rooms. For every other object she turned a page of her flip chart to reveal a large, black-and-white illustration. A cucumber, frozen grapes—flip—a bottle of Mrs. Butterworth—flip—a perfume bottle and a back-scratcher—flip—a plastic spatula, a Micronaut action figure. The audience was stunned.

A bit later, Chuckles came back with a pair of guys



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from the audience. Chicken announced that Chuckles had found her Weenie Men. Each of them wore aprons and chef hats. One held a pair of tongs; the other a geg bottle of catsup. One of the Weenie Men gave Chuckles a peck and she started to jerk about. She pulled a string of plastic sausages out of her elastic shorts, threw them on the floor, and took the shorts off. She unbuttoned her leotard at her crotch, leaving herself naked from the waist down. "Ooooh, ooooh! I'm on fire," Chuckles shouted. She reached down between her legs and started to tug. She pulled a foot of rainbow streamer out of her vagina, then another. She kept pulling. One of the Weenie Men clamped his tongs on the streamer. Chuckles screamed and screamed. Finally, she yanked out the last yard, fanned herself, and took a curtsey.

"Oh my God, the clown came all over the stage!" said Chicken, shuffling her feet in the streamers. "Ladies and gentlemen, there's nothing more that I could offer you. I can apologize for the show that I made you endure."

The show was over. It was 1:30 A.M. As the Brown Whörnet launched into a reeling Butthole Surfers-style jam, Chicken John went back to the dressing room, found a couch, and promptly fell asleep.

IN DALLAS, THERE WASN'T A STAGE, IN HOUSTON, THERE WASN'T AN AUDIENCE. IN SAN ANTONIO, THERE WASN'T A SHOW. WORSE, THE BUS HAD BROKEN DOWN AGAIN IN THE PEEKING LOT OF A HIPPIE COMPOUND IN HOUSTON. THE CIR-

Chicken held up a bottle rocket before Shawn could answer. "Shawn, I want you to fire this bottle rocket out of your ass!"

"Shawn! Shawn! Shawn!" the crowd chanted.

Astonishingly, Shawn turned around and dropped his jeans. Chicken stuck a pen cap between Shawn's ass cheeks and placed the bottle rocket in it. He lit the fuse. "Fire in the hole!" Chicken shouted.

The rocket shot across the room and exploded.

Five of Shawn's friends mobbed him, lifted him atop their shoulders, and paraded him around the room. Chicken pointed. "Look at him, ladies and gentlemen. Every time he walks down the street, people will say, 'There's that idiot Shawn who shot a bottle rocket out of his ass because Chicken John told him to.'"

The crowd cheered. Chicken John beamed. "Ladies and gentlemen, I'm going to end this show with the words that I tell all good shows with, and this has been a fucking good show for me." He paused for a second. "We, who have done so much with so little, are now qualified to do anything and everything with absolutely nothing at all. Thank you. Good night."

AFTER THE LAFAYETTE SHOW, A CUTE GIRL WALKED UP TO FLIRT WITH CHICKEN. HE TOOK A LONG BALLOON OUT OF HIS POCKET AND BLEW IT UP. "WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE FOR ME TO MAKE FOR YOU?" HE ASKED.

"Make me a portrait of you in fourth grade," she said,

Chicken, in the van, away from the others. "It's not a bunch of fucked-up no-talent acts. Chuckles is the only one that's left. She is the embodiment of what the Circus used to be."

Like a D.I.Y. punk band that took their songs on tour and accidentally learned how to play their guitars, Chicken's performers were learning how to perform. And as they learned how to perform, they were, in a way, killing the original idea of the Circus. "Should I keep doing this?" he asked himself.

"That's a sort of the tragedy of the Circus," aya Glau, the filmmaker who made the *Circus Redickless* movie. "There are ten or 12 people into the idea of seeing a shitty circus. Everyone else wants to be entertained."

Jim Rose, who runs his own now-famous circus, has been doing sideshow acts long enough to call himself "the R.E.M. of the freak world." He's only vaguely familiar with *Circus Redickless*. "I don't need to see them to have an understanding of what they do," he says. "I know the many layers of deception an organizer generally goes through to get a bunch of people to go around like punk rock exhibitors with a Grateful Dead lifestyle. It's a completely disorganized, meny-tentacled soap opera that ultimately disappoints."

Glau sees it differently. "Chicken John is the guy who does the Circus, and all of the other people are just along for the ride," he says. "A lot of bands tour because they have to. Chicken tour because they want to."

LIKE A D.I.Y. PUNK BAND THAT TOOK THEIR SONGS ON TOUR AND ACCIDENTALLY LEARNED HOW TO PLAY THEIR GUITARS, CHICKEN JOHN'S PERFORMERS WERE LEARNING HOW TO PERFORM. AND AS THEY LEARNED HOW TO PERFORM, THEY WERE, IN A WAY, KILLING THE ORIGINAL IDEA OF THE CIRCUS. "SHOULD I KEEP DOING THIS?" CHICKEN ASKED HIMSELF.

cuas milled about the dirt parking lot for two days while Chicken and Justin tried to find the problem.

On the first day in the lot, Ducky had a visitor, a friend of a friend who proudly told her that he'd recently been dubbed the best clown in Pittsburgh by the local paper. But the clown couldn't seem to find common ground. He couldn't understand exactly what Ducky did. She seemed obsessed by sex, yet she was a clown. He asked her if she was a prostitute.

After he left, Ducky was incensed. "He's a birthday party clown," she said. "Who's the real whore?"

Chicken and Justin gave up on the bus and rented a van to get to the Louisiana shows. While Chicken zoomed along the highway at 85 MPH and the rest of the troupe stayed off hunger with sleep, Chuckles and Ducky harshly abused a white bunny that had a vibrating box in its belly. "We both orgasmed there in the back seat," said Ducky. "We got started right away."

BESIDES A SKATEPARK ON THE EDGE OF TOWN, LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA'S ONLY LIVE SHOW VENUE IS A ROTTING FOOD STORE WITH CLAPBOARD FLOORS. INSIDE, THERE WAS NO RUNNING WATER, NO HEAT, AND ONLY ONE LONG EXTENSION CORD FOR THE BAND AND THE CIRCUS TO SHARE. DINNER THAT EVENING CONSISTED OF NACHOS AND A FEW GRIN PACKS OF LUNCH MEAT.

But as soon as the show started, the drunken crowd was thrilled, and the troupe was on. All of Chicken's gigs worked. Ducky's act floored them. It was a near-perfect show. Chicken decided to end it with a signature act. "Lafayette, Louisiana," she shouted, "we need a hero!"

A kid with longish hair and a pair of pants held up by a rope belt came forward and stepped up beside Chicken. His name was Shawn.

"Shawn, are you here because you need to be a hero, or because you are a hero?"

amiting. Chicken twisted the balloon three times and handed the girl a 14-inch, light-blue balloon dick and walked away without saying a word.

THE TROUPE HEADED FOR NEW ORLEANS, STILL IN THE RENTED VAN. "WHAT DO THOSE ROACHES TEST LIKE?" CHICKLES ASKED INSECTA.

"Like crickets, only bigger," Insecta said. Chuckles was obsessed with Insecta's shit. She'd seen Insecta eat all sorts of disgusting insects, but she wanted to know in what condition the bugs came out on the other end. Insecta said she didn't know; she'd never looked. At every truck stop and rest area Chuckles periscoped, reminding Insecta she wanted to examine her next turd.

Finally, Chuckles got her chance. The troupe was eating fried shrimp in a seafood joint on the wrong side of New Orleans. Chuckles and Insecta disappeared into a McDonald's across the street. When they returned to the restaurant, Chuckles was ecstatic. She announced, loudly, that she'd dissected Insecta's poo with a comb and found a piece of roach. "I felt like I discovered America when I found that leg," Chuckles said.

AT THE LAST SHOW OF THE TOUR, THE CROWD IN BATON ROUGE WAS PATHETICALLY SMALL: 25 PEOPLE. CHICKEN WAS DEPRESSED. HE HAD ABOUT \$100 LEFT FOR THE TRIP BACK. HE OWED ROMINATOR FOR ALL THE FUEL SHE PUT ON HER CREDIT CARD TO GET THE BUS TO TEXAS. TWO OUT OF EIGHT SHOWS HAD BEEN CANCELED. NONE OF THE PERFORMERS WOULD MAKE A CENT FOR THEIR 18 DAYS SPENT ON TOUR, AND CHICKEN WOULD BE EVEN MORE IN DEBT. THIS WAS HIS FIFTH TOUR AND THE CROWDS WERE STILL LACKLUSTER; MOST OF THE TIME, HALF WALKED OUT BEFORE THE SHOW ENDED. "IT'S NOT THE CIRCUS REDICKLESS ANYMORE, AND PEOPLE ARE NOTICING," SAID

BACK IN HOUSTON, THE CIRCUS WAS REUNITED WITH ITS BUS. DUCKY HAD FLOWN HOME TO NEW YORK; CHICKLES WOULD LEAVE TOMORROW. THE REST WERE ONCE AGAIN AT THE MERCY OF THE BUS AND ITS MECHANICS. AFTER A DAY OF WATCHING CHICKEN TOOL THE BUS, CHUCKLES, OUTFITTED IN MOLOTOV'S TURQUOISE TURBAN AND SPANGLED VEST, APPEARED IN THE KITCHEN WITH SOME CHEAP BEER AND A FEW PACKS OF CAMELS. "OKAY, EVERYONE, IT'S TIME FOR THE SHOW," SHE ANNOUNCED. "COME OUTSIDE."

Outside was a large stage underneath a tall arch of rusting rebar and withering tarp. One by one, the members of the troupe flopped into a semicircle of sleeping bags, pillows, and foam cushions in the middle of the stage. Chuckles then announced that the members of the troupe would perform each other's acts.

With Chicken aleep in the trailer, Justin stepped up to play ringmaster. He told bad jokes about Liberace, blew up a rubber glove, and insulted the troupe. Chuckles walked on plastic cups instead of glass. She sparked a lighter and pretended to eat it. Insecta barked like Dammit and bit at Justin's ankles. Paul the Roadie played Jericho Reese, pacing, babbling about electricity, waving his hand. Insecta aped David Apocalypse and struggled to escape from her bra. Molotov sung Chuckles' hot dog song with an affected lisp. For the finale, he pulled several feet of streamer from his asshole.

When they had run out of acts, run out of insults to toss at each other, and run out of breath, everyone collapsed on the stage, a mess of plastic cups, rubber bugs, crinkled rainbow streamers, squeaky hot dogs, and spilled beer. For a minute, a hushed silence overcame them. No one had a thing to say. No one laughed. It was over.

Justin lit a cigarette and looked up at the rest of the troupe. "Is this how the audience feels?" ■

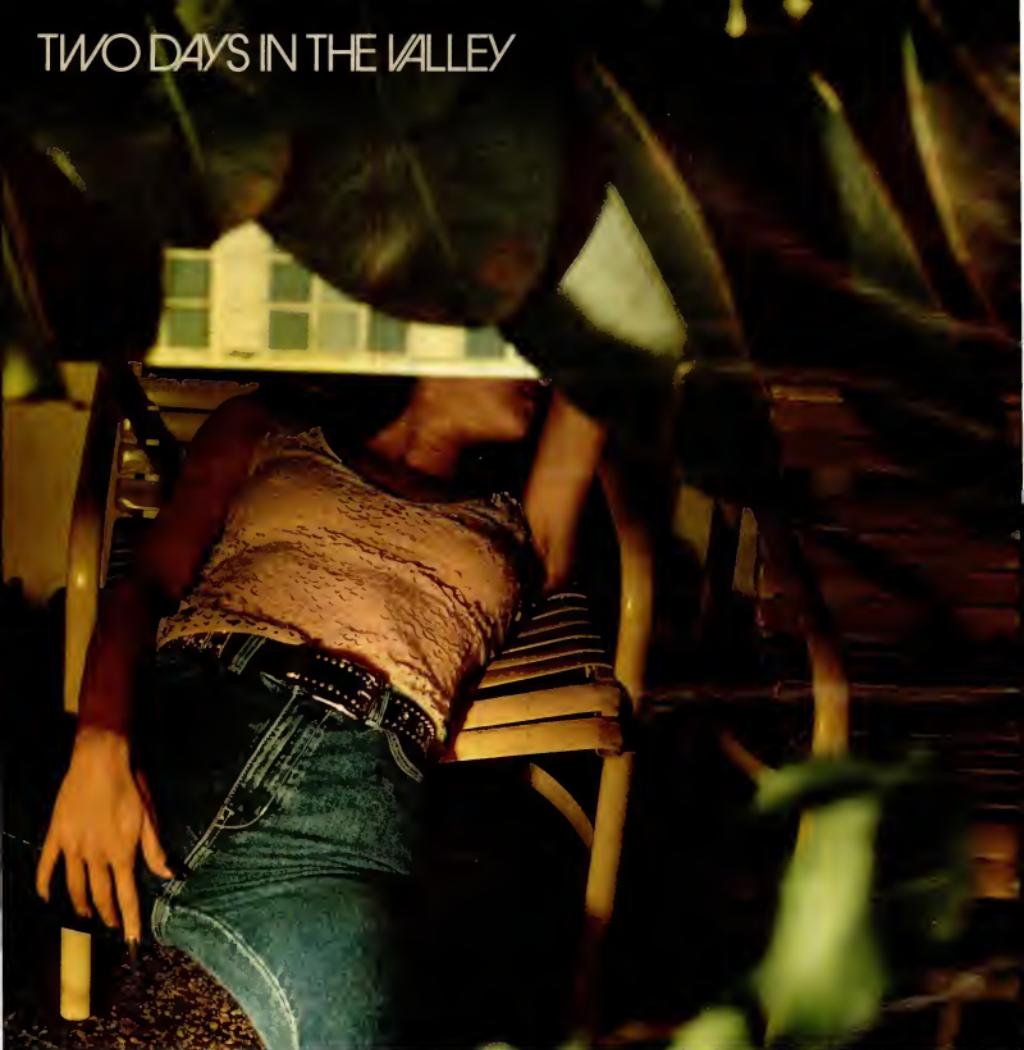
FOLLOWED FROM BROOKLYN TO BRISTOL



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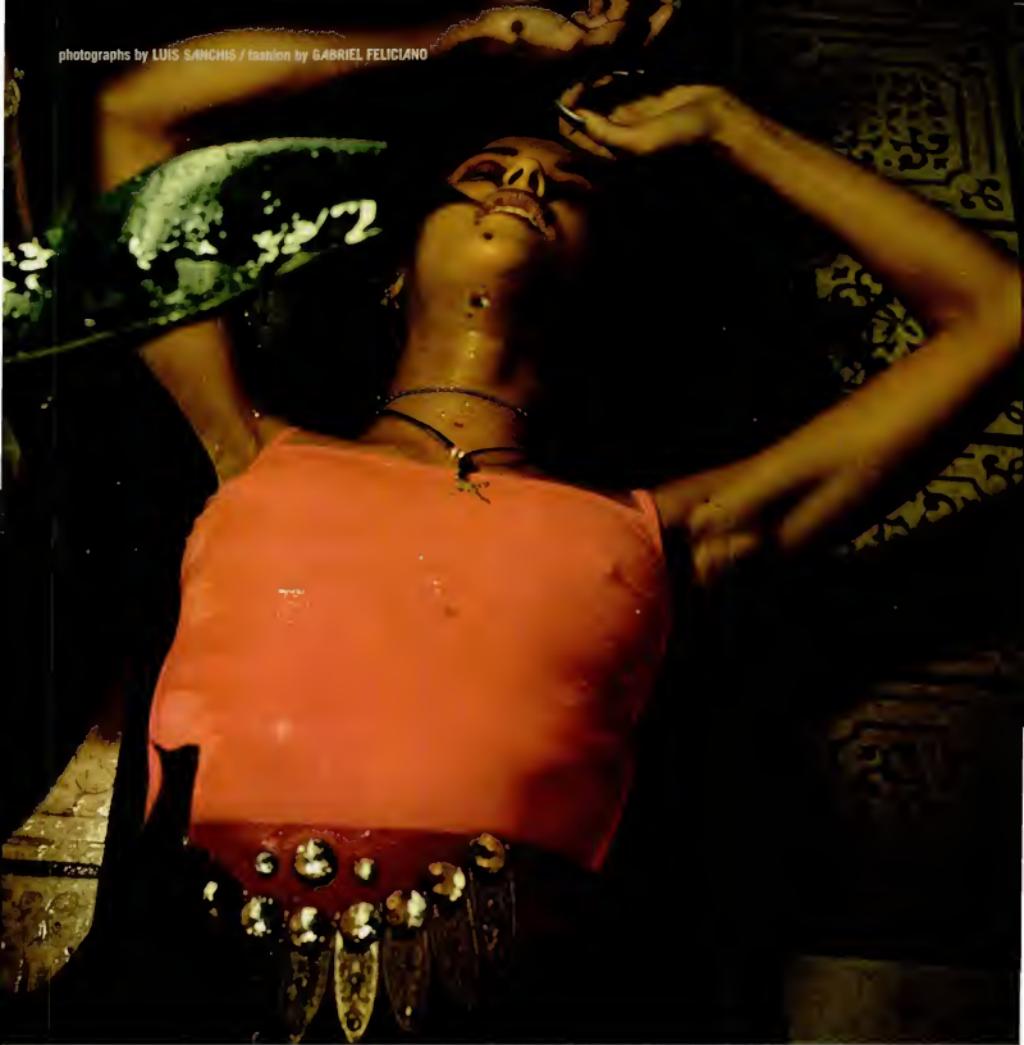


TWO DAYS IN THE VALLEY



1

photographs by LUIS SANCHIS / fashion by GABRIEL FELICIANO

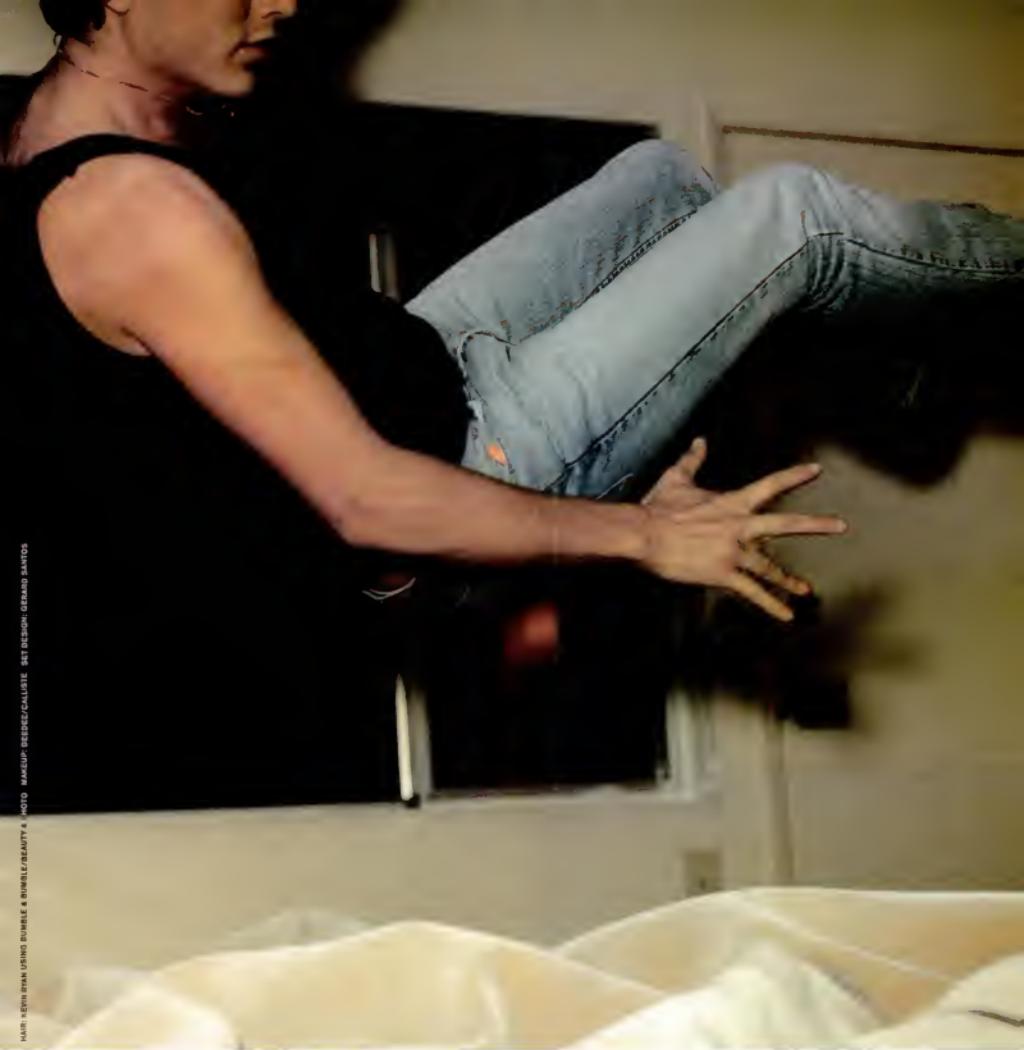












- 1 Fish gill tank top by Lawrence Steele; jeans by JNCO; jewelry and belt from Aardvarks; L'Oréal Jet-Set Quick Dry Nail Enamel in Dive Bomb. 2 Swimsuit top and dark denim jeans by Diesel; jewelry and belt from Aardvarks. 3 Swimsuit by Calvin Klein Swimwear; jewelry from Aardvarks. 4 Diagonal-striped top by Kitty Boots; jeans by D & G Dolce & Gabbana; belt and jewelry from Aardvarks; yellow beaded choker by Delphine Charlotte Parmentier; ankle boots by Kitty Boots. 5 Hooded sweatshirt by JNCO; crewneck T-shirt by Calvin Klein Underwear; Blood Straight Jackets sunglasses by Oakley. 6 Sheer tank and leather jeans by Helmut Lang; jewelry and belt from Aardvarks. 7 Nylon tank by Helmut Lang; jeans by W.L.T.; Chuck Taylor All Star sneakers by Converse. For fashion information, see Where to Buy.



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Beverly Mitchell -

Holly Marie Combs -

Shannen Doherty -

Karl Russell -

Jessica Biel -

Riggs Milano -

Rignon Hamigan -

Kalle Holmes -

Michelle Williams -

Sarah Michelle Gellar -

BETH ORTON

TITLE...
Central Reservation

LABEL...
Deconstruction/Arista

7



ANI DIFRANCO

TITLE...
Up Up Up Up Up Up

LABEL...
Righteous Babe

5

ALL FOLKED-UP

Acoustic warriors of the nu-folk movement, Beth Orton and Ani DiFranco reckon "lovely" is the new edge in 1999. by Joshua Clover

Surely these are strange days when folkies draw edge cred. But they do. Now that irony has killed the radio star and digital has become the main current of the musical discussion, maybe sincerity is, by default, the new avant-garde. They've got acoustic guitars and good intentions, and, against the grain of history, that seems radical right about now.

Or maybe it's just that musicians are now shaped like a hole-in-the-middle Frisbee and it's all edges from here on out. After all, it's hard to imagine Ani and Beth on the same margin. DiFranco the Righteous Babe banks her cred on tongue-wrestling personal politics; Orton's claim is a little vaguer—something about being the Chemical Brothers' sweet soul sister.

Ani DiFranco is gonna make a great record someday. On each successive disc she stretches some particular skill: elaborate syncopated vocals, ethereal vision, alt-lovers' rock, folk-punk guitar heroism. Stunningly, *Up Up Up Up Up Up's* discovery is a sweet, sticky melody; opener "Tis of Thee" is the prettiest music she's ever written. And for a singer whose finest work song has always been fury, "Tis of Thee" comes eight times softer than you'd expect. Not that everything's suddenly jake. She breaks off a little something for America, tempered only by an attempt to love the place despite the people—"We'll never live long enough to undo everything we've done...to you."

It's her "This Land Is Your Land" moment, and she plays Woody Guthrie 1999 convincingly, selling a



Chemical sister:
Beth Orton, a Joni for the
Ecstasy generation,
has nothing to say but
says it so sweetly.



Pretty on the outside: Righteous babe Ani DiFranco goes soft on us.

bleeding heart with a wide-eyed melody. And so it goes. "Everest": pretty and delicate, "Angry Anymore"; pretty and prudish (plus, before the title-chorus, she says she's not). You might not be sure what record you wandered into, but these songs carry a curious charm, especially in the open, less mannered vocals. Rarely has loveliness seemed so experimental.

Given how DiFranco invented herself under the banner "Not a Pretty Girl," it takes brass *huevos* to bring that particular flavor, especially when DiFranco's old school is history: Her maximalist rants have morphed into a Tom Waits-meets-the-Beat happening, the guitar strum and Drang replaced by muted, uneven slink. If the Guthrieism mourns for what'll never be, songs such as "Het Shaped Hat" and "Jukebox" conjure some weird reconstructed bohemia-that-never-was (complete with stumbling stand-up bass and hipster poetry). The best you can say about these passages is they make you grateful for the rest of the album. But even the loveliness-as puzzling as it is pleasing. When we hear the singer who delivered the best "fuck you" of the decade oooh "The moon was so beautiful that the ocean held up a mirror," we might wonder, "Hey, who's you?" And what have you done with Avenging Ani?

Maybe this year's model is just happier; than we know what to do with. Maybe we only have room for one beautiful righteous hard rhymer, and it's Lauryn Hill's *fin de siècle*. Either way, DiFranco is both so singular and so prolific she can eurive an unremarkable album or two wandering among the possibilities, while we wait for her to bring it all back home.

Beth Orton will never make a great album: She has nothing to say. But she says it with one of the most remarkable voices in creation. Pure instruments themselves can carry meaning.

and emotional power—what they can't deliver is complexity. With no other options available, *Central Reservation* is simply beautiful.

Trailer Park, her first album, seemed almost guilty about its virtues—as if folk were a four-letter word that had to be camouflaged in sampled loops and spatial wank. *Central Reservation* brings it straight to your head: Between the backward electric guitar on the opener and softly electro Ben Watt beat on the closing retake of the title song, it's pretty much all acoustic, all the time. The voice is left to stand alone, like a busker on an empty plaza, and it's a moving come-on. Here's my one true thing, says the record, and I'm trying to make it stand for everything.

But sometimes it just falls. The album divides neatly into sides (each one six songs, each ending with a version of "*Central Reservation*"), and after the riveting "Stolen Car," the first side sinks into bland optimism and bumper sticker pathos: "What's the use in regrets? They're just things we haven't done yet?" This is why we mistrust folk music in the first place—as a genre, it stands on the verge of Simper Fi.

But then she remembers the real question: How sweet a sound will it take to save a wretch like her? Roundabout the flip side she whispers, "Some of the worst wrongs get righted on three chords," finds a heartbeat groove, and it's on. "Blood Red River" chills like hearing a traditional for the first time; "Devil's Song" and "Feel to Believe" continue the flawless drift through the wreckage of the British folk tradition. And for the duration, her voice is so clear it renders the ideas of cred, edge, and great album irrelevant; for a half-record, we'll settle for amazing grace. ■



BUILT TO SPILL
TITLE... *Keep It Like a Secret*
LABEL... Warner Bros.

Built to Spill are maybe the only (formerly) indie rockers whose fans trade mad bootlegs but don't get into that cosmic noodle-dance thing. Sure, Pavement's minions once catalogued the group's guitar duels, but ever since Steve's Scott reigned in their freakiness, what's the point? As for Sonic Youth, heck, Thurston Moore is busy putting out remixed records with Alec Empire and Spring Heel Jack.

But bless the bleeding old-school heart, Spill CEO Doug Martsch is still working merrily away, making the most beautiful baroque electric guitar murals in modern rock. Kinda like Jackson Pollock doing Roy Lichtenstein, he channels his eddying jazz into pop forms, blurring the lines between structure and abstraction. Even when he lets fly, his narratives feel more like cut-and-paste of great guitar routines than your standard stream-of-consciousness whining. Maybe that's why Martsch's music appeals to both the breakbeat crowd and those who think Phish smell kinda funny. Perhaps Thurston should be making records with him.

Some things have changed since 1997's handsome and still-resonant *Perfect From Now On*. Martsch now seems less bucolic, less dreamy; if *Perfect* was the sound of a man more-or-less contentedly musing on the stars, *Secret* projects a more agitated, earthbound soul. Cellos and melotrons and second guitars are out—this is a power trio record: Drummer Scott Plouf whacks gracefully through the changes, bassist Brett Neelon plays a hyper game

of hopecotch, and Martsch multitracks his leads into whorling fractals of glisten-sendo and epiggaisted whoopie. Yet melody, which swarms through his songs like mosquitoes at a Minnesota summer sunset, is still a strangely ambient thing here, as it was on *Perfect*, kinetic and fleeting. Lyrics, often extended fragments of second-person judgment-passing and advice-giving, also pass glancingly. Words and phrases become rhythm and texture—listen to how the final verses chase the guitar tsunami skyward on "Carry the Zero," a song that turns a hard-to-fathom counseling session into a cathedral full of snapping heartstrings.

This sugar-rush quality mostly works to Martsch's advantage on songs whose very evasiveness rewards multiple listenings. But it's bound to disappoint those hoping for a return to the more focused and emotionally bare-assed popcraft of his early singles (collected on K'e's *The Normal Years*) and the fine *There's Nothing Wrong With Love* LP. These days, Martsch's purer pop incarnation, the Hal Bender, his scruffy ongoing side-project with Ben Happening/Dub Nerdic baritone Calvin Johnson; you can't help but wonder what might happen to Built to Spill's music if he didn't have this outlet. He might be making epic versions of songs like "Twin Falls," which would be dandy. Then again, it might just slow down the spillage, leaving less sweet floodwater to paddle around in. For now, bring an inner tube and a Koozie: You'll be well-served. **WILL HERMES**



SLEATER-KINNEY
TITLE... *The Hot Rock*
LABEL... Kill Rock Stars

What do you do for an encore when you start your career practically shooting out of a cannon? In the course of just two records—1996's *Cat the Doctor* and 1997's *Dig Me Out*—Sleater-Kinney took the full measure of both anger and delight, holding nothing back. Some songs crackled with so much muted rage they made your hair stand on end—but they also

made you want to pony. In the universe of Sleater-Kinney, the two have never been mutually exclusive.

On their fourth LP, *The Hot Rock*, Sleater-Kinney solve the problem of where to head next by refusing to even address it: They just take off and go. *The Hot Rock* sees them simultaneously narrowing their focus and broad-

9

The Shredder

Eighteen records. Twenty-two sentences. No mercy
by Joshua Clover

The sampler *Bombay the Hard Way: Guns, Cars & Sitzers* (Motel) sounds how I always imagined Talvin Singh would, atop Brownsploitation beats getting lifted on the subcontinental vibe. The Nine-Nine's probably a good year for merchandised (rather than home-made) collections all around, before CD



Waifflower:
Dimitri From
Paris proves
the old adage
that DJs
don't dance.

burners and MP3s make the whole idea history. Pro-pot benefit compilation *Hempilation II: freetheweed* (Capricorn) is better than being stoned—and why free Tibet when we can celebrate doopy grinning guys right here at home, plus get raucous Vic Chesnutt in the deal? Gallic house compilation *Respect Is Burning, Vol. 2* (Astralwerks) is cooler than its Parisian nightspot namesake: Dimitri remixes Stardust, no ten-dollar drinks.

Duran Duran were born to be hit: Greatest (Capitol) naija why we loved the wild boys, and cuts the crap. But Gang of Four's so damn important that double-disc anthology *100 Flowers Bloom* (Rhino) is inevitably overgenerous with the Gang's long march from cultural revolution to brittle regime. Still, not nearly as depressing as Vanessa Williams' arc of a diva: Greatest Hits: The First Ten Years (Mercury) goes from spunk to amooze in minutes. Coolest comp is Galaxy 500's *The Portable Galaxie 500* (Rykodisc), which is like going to a French movie with the children of Marx and Coca-Cola and the Beach Boys and barbiturates.

XTC, the old guard of pop idiosyncrasy, come back to us with *Apple Venus Volume One* (Idea/TVT), but they still feel gone. Hooking up *Shanice* (the proto-Brandy) with supposedly brilliant production junkies LaFace should be tons of fun, but on her self-titled album the downtempo jones just leaves

leas bounce to the ounce. On 100% Colombian (DiFontaine/Virgin), *Fun Lovin' Criminals* are stoned on Barry White and Johnny Watson, and if two good songs are enough, it's the joint. Even more multicultural is AM-savior *Emilia's Chicana-Scandinavian* vibe: *Big Big World* (Universal) is sometimes Swede'n Lo, but sometimes real azucar, and the best cut's "Like Chocolate," baby. Bittersweeter is the return of Kelly Willis, pure-voiced C&W priestesa who had to go alt to get re-signed; I'm as grateful for pick of the month *What I Deserve* (Rykodisc) as I am pleased about the six missing years.

Downbeat 4 Hero dream of File Under Electronica status, but *Two Pages* (Mercury) is straight fusion; file under crap. Sea and Cakesister Sam Prekop goes solo with a self-titled album on Thrill Jockey, accompanied by a posse of "post-rock" pals. Uh, guys, can we go back to calling it jazz now? Prekop's kid Jim O'Rourke also does production for Smog's lovely and spare *Knock Knock* (Drag City). Indie minimalism or folk music? *Snakfarm* leave no doubt on *Songs From My Funeral* (RCA), wherein Anna Domino covers a history lesson's worth of front-porch swing in her mournful contralto. On Dan Bern's double-live *Smartie Mine* (a self-released album available only from the artist's Web site,



Kelly Willis: Croon softly and carry a big guitar.

www.dbhq.com), the singer's still tangled up in Dylan, and it's hard to take—but if you think of him as a boho Steve Earle, he's all right; he's just here. None of these can hold a candle to *Slowdive's Mojave 3* and their campfire micromasterpiece *Out of Tune* (4AD), low and wasted on high lonely. Folk music is the new crack. ■



ening it, thematically and technically. Sleater-Kinney's songs are built from simple components—strategically placed handclaps, drummer Janet Weiss's sure-footed seat beats, Carrie Brownstein's elegant etched-steel guitar motifs—that dovetail and interface swimmingly into a kind of iridescent pop-music jacquard that's homespun viewed from one angle and dazzlingly complex seen from another. Singer Corin Tucker's silvery, nervous vibrato is one of the most distinctive and most affecting sounds in contemporary rock'n'roll. On *The Hot Rock*, she's more in control of her voice than ever. It no longer sounds on the verge of gloriously flying apart at the seams, as it did on *Call the Doctor*. It now has more shading, a wider range of colors. Or more than half the 13 songs here, she and Brownstein—whose own voice has a pleasingly supple, conversational quality—sing together, spurring each other on as they navigate the song's multilayered contrapuntal melodies.

The understatedness of their vocals is sometimes devastating.

"The Size of Our Love" assays the despair that settles in when a loved one is downed by a serious illness. "Our love is the size of this hospital room. You're my hospital groom." Brownstein sings tenderly, but it's the breezy offhandedness of her wordplay that takes you apart. And on "Banned From the End of the World," Sleater-Kinney face the future of rock'n'roll not with dread, boredom, or uncertainty, but with excitement: "I've no millennial fear / The future is here, it comes every year." Brownstein plucks a flurry of high guitar notes as if she were shaking little gold apples from a tree; Tucker closes the song with a line that could be the Sleater-Kinney manifesto: "We're the band from the end of the world." They just might be—but their signal, beamed in from the very edge of the planet, comes through loud and clear. STEPHANIE ZACHAREK



PRINCE PAUL

TITLE...
A Prince Among Thieves

LABEL...
Tommy Boy

9



THE ROOTS

TITLE...
Things Fall Apart

LABEL...
MCB

9

What's so satisfying about the new offerings from Prince Paul and the Roots is how cut-off they seem from both indie-rap's 12-inch fetishism and pop-rap's video-single orientation. Both artists are using hip-hop techniques to create hour-long suites of conceptual pop, resisting the reigning industry model of the hip-hop LP as all-the-hits-and-plenty-of-filler.

Indeed, *A Prince Among Thieves* and *Things Fall Apart* return to those late '80s nu-skool days when rap first realized its potential for elaboration beyond the confines of 45 rpm. Prince Paul was on that revolution as the sampler wizard behind De La Soul: *A Prince Among Thieves* could be heard as the renaissance of hip-hop's psychedelic edge.

Paul simply cannot leave sound pure: On all of the 35 tracks here, loops are twisted through grisly effects. Even the guest rappers (who include Kool Keith, De La Soul, Xzibit, and Biz Markie) find themselves shot through weird filters, jammed through phone lines, sometimes willfully obscured by noise. But this cartoon panoply of sound never loses a powerful sense of melodic derangement. Crucially, Paul's ideas, both lyrical and musical, are always fascinating even at their most dementedly wayward. *A Prince Among Thieves* may well be as adventurous an investigation of hip-hop's infinite remit as 1999 will give us.

The Roots have been here before: The Philly-based crew's *Illadelph Halflife* was their rap LP of '96 for aging

disenfranchised B-boys everywhere. *Things Fall Apart*, astonishingly, is even better. While the resister-than-thou indie-rap underground has merely inverted the mainstream's plays braggadocio (expect a grimy New York 12-inch to emerge soon called "Proud to Be Poor"), the Roots have always dealt in a more doubtful, politicized engagement with the problems of maintaining artistry in hip-hop. "Table of Contents" and "Nothing New" are precise detonations of both mercenary and brute-realist impulses in rap, while the incredible textual riot in which the Roots surround these mus-

ings is never less than utterly absorbing.

Warping R&B into locked-groove robo-funk ("Next Movement"), throwing jazz into the depths of dub-space ("The Spark"), attenuating hardcore beats into pure silence ("The Realm"), the Roots have created perhaps rap's first melancholy masterpiece: There's a downed, fragmented feel to the music that weaves through the lyrics bleak resignation to instill real poignancy and affect. *Things Fall Apart* is a fearsomely intelligent yet fervent inspiration for anyone daring to step to a mic or a deck as rap stumbles into the future. NEIL KULKARNI



ICE

TITLE...
Bad Blood

LABEL...
In Bloom/Reprise

7

ller than illbient, *Bad Blood* makes Tricky's last album sound fresh-faced and angelic. Ice are Kevin Martin (the man behind the brilliant *Macro Dub Infection* compilations), Justin Broadrick (leader of grindcore unit Godflesh), bassist Dave Cockrane, and drummer Lou Coccotelli, with guest input from Brixia Bargeld of Einstürzende Neubauten, noisier trip-hopper DJ Vadim, and other denizens of the dark-side. As you might expect with such a lineup, the result is a nightmareish soundtrack perfect for a hip horror flick: a grumbling, rabid spew of slavering voices, hammered beats, and disorient-

ing sounds that creep in and out of the mix—all happening at a snail's pace.

With songs shifting gears without warning, *Bad Blood* is uneasy listening: I actually had to take a rest every couple of tracks or so. At times, this kind of techno-Goth gunk runs the risk of getting pretty cartoonish: Check out titles like "The Snakepit" and "A New Breed of Rat." But Martin and crew add just enough genuine venom and dread to make it stick. Try the slow-grind apocalypse of "When Two Worlds Collide" or Martin and El-P's dual rant "Trapped in the Third Dimension" for sick, repulsive fun. JASON GROSS



SPARKLEHORSE

TITLE...
Good Morning Spider

LABEL...
Capitol

8

Despite his Virginian roots and affinities with fellow Southern eccentrics Vic Chesnutt and Daniel Johnston, Sparklehorse's Mark Linkous has often been compared with melancholy Brit narcissist Thom Yorke. In fact, the band's aesthetic—lyrically and musically invoking a lone man wandering the face of a ghost planet, every surface of the

sparse and broken landscape suffused with cool light—so resonated with Radiohead that, after hearing a tape of the band's first record, 1995's *Vivaxiesubmarine/transmissionplot*, they invited Linkous and company to open for them on tour. But the bleary psychedelic-country haze of *Good Morning Spider* comes across more like Bowie in his post-glam

Singles by Charles Raron

With rockers and rappers now so rich and bored that they have to childishly trash "the media" in order to get media attention, I'd like to suggest a barely tapped means of cheap publicity: professional sports try-outs. Hey, it's working for Master P. Plus, the inevitable failure and humiliation will be good for the soul. Play ball!

A TRIBE CALLED QUEST VS. APHRODITE, "Ince Again" (live Electro)

It's as if the lackluster, corny original from *Beats, Rhymes & Life* was suddenly plugged into a huge, chugging super-generator. Beats piston with a metallic whir, guitar lines wiggle, the R&B vocal gets slinky, and O-Tip and Phife's smugly fleecy rhymes spring to life, while the trademark furious bass lines and electro-gurgles of jungle producer Aphrodite steal the show.



A Tribe Called Quest: before electro-shock treatment from remixer Aphrodite.

HOLE, "Malibu" (Geffen)

An "intense ode to the beach," according to *Billboard*; but with the mail-order rock guitars (autographed by Billy Corgan) and Courtney Love's off-key crooning, it's more of a roaring epilogue for celebrity fatigue syndrome. Like, it's brewer to go through the motions in style than flame out with passion. Very late-'90s posy, but not that compelling.

MR. DIBBS, 231 Ways to Fry an Egg EP (Four Ways to Rock)

The leader of Cincinnati's 1200 Hobos turntablist crew cranks and twists breakbeats with the quixotic, groove-grinding abandon of a long-forgotten Mississippi bluesman. His vinyl grab-bag—crackling drums, wailing guitars, screwy spoken words—take you to a world where time stops, spins on its head, and convenes a scratchy cipher of Neil Armstrong, Dean Martin, and Yogi Bear (or at least I think so).

NEW RADICALS, "You Get What You Give" (MCA)

It takes a lot of balls to posit yourself as the revolutionary future of alternative music when you sound exactly like Hall and Oates. But somehow winsome lead singer/windbreaker-poser Gregg

Alexander has done just that, even baiting Marilyn Manson (or at least his bodyguards) into threats of bodily harm (what a shock). All in all, a pretty cool Hall and Oates song.

THE OFFSPRING, "Pretty Fly (For a White Guy)" (Columbia)

The first sign that a rock band is getting gray around the edges: They write a mean-spirited novelty tune ridiculing their core audience. And what exactly are these "puppies" (punk puppies) so angry about? That white kids listen to Vanilla Ice instead of Ice Cube? What cave do they live in?

PAPERCLIP PEOPLE, 4 My Peeps EP (Planet E)

DJ/producer Carl Craig is a hard-bitten sensualist crusader—he washes you under with clicking, swooshing electronics that build into thrillingly chilly wave-forms. And because this is Detroit techno, simple pleasure is suspended (five tracks total almost 50 minutes) with an almost Marxist perversity. For his peeps, for sure.

THE PROMISE RING, "Boys + Girls" (Jade Tree), THE NEW RISING SONS, The New Rising Sons EP (grapeOS)

When indie rock went up to its 4-track bedroom in the early '90s, it was all about mad/seed nursery rhymes over rudimentary guitar racket; endearing amateurishness was the norm. But recently there's been a rebirth of ardently punkish young bands inspired by Fugazi's rhythmic rigor (not their ideology) and Nirvana's warped melodies (not their tragic sellout). Milwaukee's Promise Ring are the freshest of the lot, with Davey von Bohlen abstractly yelping about birds and girls, while Jason Gnewikow's guitar gets arthritic without smirking or jerking off. The New Rising Sons (featuring an ex-Promise Ringer) are even more of a musically storm-twin guitars buzzing and howling around fierce, irony-free vocals. Hey, it's rock'n'roll with skinned elbows and grown-up dreams! Who knew? ■

Address: Four Ways to Rock, 124 McGuff Street, #400, Mississauga, ON, Canada H2Y 2E5; grapeOS, 332 Bleeker Street, No. K42, New York, NY 10014; Jade Tree, 2310 Kennwynn Road, Wilmington, DE 19810; Planet E, PO Box 27218, Detroit, MI 48227

REVIEW'S CONTINUES ▶

acoustic mode, or, more tellingly, like something Syd Barrett might have presented us with after a nice 30-year anapase-rebuilding nap: wrapped in shiny paper and topped with a bow, a souvenir of a harrowing voyage to the abyss and back.

Linkous, Sparklehorse's creative center and only permanent member, is a stranger to the abyss: He spent more than a year recovering from a chemically induced brush with death during the tour with Radiohead. It's tempting to hear *Good Morning Spider* as Linkous's exorcism of this tête-à-tête with mortality. Then again, Sparklehorse have always trafficked in an off-kilter morbidity; their music one long slow waltz in a haunted attic. Unlike the bemusedly voyeuristic storyteller of *Vivideiros*, this time around our narrator has his eyes trained on his own wan face and atrophied limbs.

His vocals proceed to a mega-

phonie wheeze, Linkous spits lyrics like "I wanna new body that's strong, I'm a butchered cow... / I wanna be a shiny new baby's spongey brain" on the album's angriest and noisiest cut, "Pig." Elsewhere, Linkous's gentler moments resemble Chesnutt at his most vulnerable and self-mocking. On "Saint Mary" (the title refers to the London hospital where Linkous underwent rehab) he woozily bleats "Blanket me, sweet nurse, and keep me from burning," his creaky voice cradled in a shivery, fire-real arrangement of acoustic guitar, cello, violin, and piano.

Good Morning Spider is the waking realization, set to stark, soul-burrowing music, that the bad dream wasn't a dream at all. That Linkous opted to purge his nightmare publicity is our very good fortune; not death but life, in all its fragility and pain, finds its purest expression in *Spider*'s tapestry of scars. SARAH MANAUGH

And call it real" like a seasoned pro. The problem is that these guys have been feeling pretty much the same thing

for a little too long, and the soul and fire that was once wholly theirs seems vanished for good. JOE GROSS



SEBADOH

TITLE...
The Sebadoh
LABEL...
Sub Pop/Sire

5

In one of the many immortal moments in *Trainspotting*, Sick Boy muses on the eternal problem of heroes who've "got it, then lose it, and it's gone forever." It's a damning list: Niven, McLaren, Reed, Bowie. Were he a Bush administration indie-geek rather than a Thatcher era junkie, Sick Boy might very well have included Mr. Lou Barlow.

Back when 7-inch singles were the coin of the realm and the International Pop Underground was just that, Sebadoh were raging wimpdom's ne plus ultra. Barlow, flaky foil Eric Gaffney, and Jason Lowenstein were the hardest-aching men in show business, and their kingdom of bedrooms and basements knew no bounds.

1991's *Sebadoh III* stands as one of the '90s' finest albums, a guitar-rock scattergun as genre-inspiring as Big Black's *Atomizer* or Sonic Youth's *Sister*. By Bakasat and Harmacy, Gaffney was gone and Sebadoh was a streamlined alt-rock machine. Lowenstein's thrash-lite had found a steady, if yelping, voice, and Barlow's sturdy pop prevented him from disappearing into his own navel. Their unique charm lay in that con-

stant possibility of navel-disappearance. Emotive flailing coupled with random acts of melody made Sebadoh extraordinary, and to varnish it away was to lose their delicate *duende*.

The Sebadoh finds cousin Lou obsessed as always with desire's combustion and confinement—so what else is new? His voice is still one of rock's unused gems, welcome and reassuring like a well-worn pair of corduroys. But his "see how we've grown" on "Tree" rings hilariously false (unless maybe he's talking about getting married and moving to L.A.). Even with Jason "You Can't Call Me George Harrison Any More" Lowenstein coughing up the lion's share of the songs, *The Sebadoh* sounds like everyone's been drinking from a very communal well (brand new drummer Russ Pollard's contribution is called "Break Free"; these topics have got to be in the contract somewhere).

The pick-to-clicks are obvious: Barlow's "Flame" (is it a horse? a girl? fame?) sounds ready to storm the Modern Rock airwaves with its finely compressed drone'n'drum; Lou intones "You can feel anything you want to feel /



SOURCE DIRECT

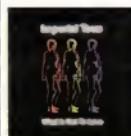
TITLE...
Excuse the Demons
LABEL...
Science/Rstrwerk

7

Darkside jungle, a.k.a. techstep, is a well-established genre now, with its own ingrained conventions. The style's core—droning, doomy "Reese" bass sound, the rigid, barely syncopated two-step beat—have grown too familiar for discomfort. But Source Direct—a duo from Hertfordshire, the same London commuter county that spawned their ally Photek—refuse to play by the rules. On their debut full-length album, *Excuse the Demons*, there's a track titled "Mind Weaver"—read it as a statement of malevolent intent, for Source Direct's particularly hyperkinetic strain of breakbeat science riddles and addles the brain, outmaneuvering perception and testing the ear's ability to trace the path of the beats.

Paralleling Photek's obsession with surveillance ("The Hidden Camera"), Source Direct are possessed by paranoid fantasies and conspiratorial visions. Tracks like "Concealed Identity" and "Technical Warfare" encircle and close in on the listener's head, compressing your perceptual field in the same way that a panic attack contracts the oxygen-absorbing capacity of the lungs.

Like last year's mini-album, *Controlled Developments*, *Excuse* is dark drum'n'base at its sharpest, swiftest, and most inidious, infiltrating and impaling the senses with relentless, pathological guile. Source Direct's claustrophobic extremity is ideal on a 12-inch single, but over the length of an album, you'll need to take a breather and come up for air. BETHAN COLE



IMPERIAL TEEN

TITLE...
What Is Not to Love
LABEL...
Slash/London

6

There's a kind of "nice" I like to think of as post-traumatic nice. It's the sort of do-unto-others that comes when things have been done to you: a resolve to be kind that's an existential act, a pledge to smile prettier than your oppressors. You can hear that foreboding shadowing Imperial Teen's surface sweetness. The San Francisco quartet makes deceptively saccharine pop songs; the camaraderie in their sound has a delightful hint of paranoia, as if they're huddling together against the world.

"Lipstick"—the beat song on Imperial Teen's second album, *What Is Not to Love*—sounds like breezy sugar rock until you clue into the dude-what'a-

your-problem? confrontation in the lyrics. "Why you gotta be so proud?" asks singer Roddy Bottum, "I'm the one with lipstick on."

What Is Not to Love is militantly low-key. And hopelessly New Wave: The guitar chords leading into "Year of the Tan" are lifted straight out of the Billy Idol songbook, only with less-ambitious hair. Later in the song, when Bottum claims "I'm not just another fan," you don't really believe him. The charm here is that the group comes off like a circle of friends hanging out listening to music more than a collection of rock stars making it. I bet they're real cute at karaoke. SARAH YOWELL

Label Profile

This is hardcore! California's Vinyl Communications label plumbs the extremities of digital sound with a wicked sense of humor. by Douglas Wolk

Beneath the soft shell of the popular music of youth movements, there's always some kind of hardcore music driven by anger, ideology, bitter jokes, and the need to make things rougher, louder, darker, and newer. The Chula Vista, California, label Vinyl Communications is American ground central for extreme electronics—the new incarnation of hardcore—and it's been around since hardcore meanz only punk rock.

Bob Beyerie started the label in 1986 as a way to document the local political punk scene, including his own group Neighborhood Watch. But technowierdness became a big part of his aesthetic early on. As Neighborhood Watch incorporated sampled guitars and drum loops and morphed into the still-running industrial-college project Tit Wrench, VC's purview expanded to noise recordings, from Merzbow's abstract waves of force to prank phone calls (notably the "Longmont Potion Castle" series) taking a few breaks while Beyerie concentrated on his plumbing business: "Whenever one thing slows down, I go do the other."

In the last year, though, Vinyl Communications has taken off, mostly thanks to electronic instruments' potential for generating new extremes of noise. The advent of hardcore techno's ultrafast, ultraloud gabber style was an inspiration for VC's artists—the label makes an ingenious T-shirt with casses printed below the Gerber baby's head, while New York gabber hero Delta 9 recently joined the VC crew.

Beyond the familiar unease of its noise, prank-call, and gabber camps, VC specializes in recordings that are disturbing in ways for which there aren't yet names, and very often funny, too. Vomit Lunch's single "Violent Clash Between Killer Bastards of Ear Dot Remix" is a series of garbled sound effects, sound bites, and digital ejaculations flying by at whirlwind speed; the CD Lucas & Friends Discover A World of Sounds is a collage of home recordings (kids taping themselves singing, cassette-recorded letters, old recordable phonograph records), spliced together, and graced with occasional musical accompaniment—half charming and cute, half voyeuristic and unnerving.

VC is also insanely prolific, with more

than 40 releases in 1998. A lot of that volume is coming from 19-year-old Miguel Depedro, who records splattery, sarcastic tracks under the names Kid-606, Ariel, and Compact Digital Audio. Depedro is a new-generation computer-head who has no interest in conventional dance music. He is currently assembling a band of under-21-year-old digital musicians called Tigerbeat—kind of like the Backstreet Boys, but it would actually mean something.

The best recent VC discs start from the relentlessness of gabber and digital hardcore, and yank it in a weirder direction. The outfit Disc Is Depedro's "digital audio terrorism" project with members of Lesser and Metmoe: "So far, we have been documenting—or, as Andy Warhol would say, 'framing'—every kind of glitch we can think of, from shaking Jaz drives to DAT deck sample rate conversion errors."



Powerbook rock: digital terrorist outfit O.R.I.

They've released five discs in the past year, including a two-CD set of which one disc is (literally) pre-microwaved, and an album made entirely from damaged recordings by Japanese avant-guitarist K.K. Null.

But the best introduction to the VC aesthetic is probably Lesser's *Welcome to the American Experience*, a collection of studio work, live recordings, and remixes, including "Markus Popp Can Kiss My Redneck Ass," a 14-minute mauling of European techno sterility, drum 'n' bass elegance, and the foolish consistency that's the hobgoblin of electronic music. You could think about dancing to Lesser—or even to a lot of their labelmates—but having a seizure might be more appropriate. ■

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REVIEWS CONTINUE ▶





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Heavy Rotation

A recap of the past few months' most notable releases



VIC CHESNUTT

TITLE...
*The Salesman
and Bernadette*
LABEL...
Capricorn

What you're missing A sustained, mature achievement by one of rock's most frustrating depressives.

Conclusion The harder you look at this album, the harder it'll stare back.



FATBOY SLIM

TITLE...
*You've Come a
Long Way, Baby*
LABEL...
Skint/
Rstralwerks

What you're missing A populist grab bag of rock'n'roll tricks that proves few producers working today are as keenly attuned to the pleasure principle as the Fatboy.

Conclusion As an unexpectedly successful instance of canon expansion, *You've Come a Long Way, Baby* suggests Norman Cook could go a long way further.



LO-FIDELITY ALLSTARS

TITLE...
*How to Operate
With a Blown
Mind*
LABEL...
Skint/Song

What you're missing A London-based seven-piece of DJs and musicians who simultaneously define and expand Big Beat's rowdy messiah.

Conclusion The most suggestive and provocative Brit-dance debut since *Dummy* or *Maxinquaye*.



METHOD MAN

TITLE...
*Tical 2000:
Judgement Day*
LABEL...
Def Jam

What you're missing Meth's guttural roar, which has stylistic antecedents in such legendary smoke-belters as Howlin' Wolf and Clarence "Frogman" Henry.

Conclusion The Wu-Tang Clan star talks loudly and carries a big schick.



R.E.M.

TITLE...
Up
LABEL...
Warner Bros.

What you're missing Michael Stipe at his most, er, beautiful. Narcissistic retreat into private space, a self-indulgence for some celebs, is a necessity for him.

Conclusion Bracketing a few relapses into martyrdom, this time round we squirm with Stipe and carry a few schicks.



BUSTA RHYMES

TITLE...
*Extinction Level
Event*
LABEL...
Elektra

What you're missing A cover of "Iron Man" with Ozzie Osbourne that plays to Rhyme's white-boy fauna like a Carmen Electra pinup, and with Janet Jackson on "What's It Gonna Be?" that sounds like sex.

Conclusion As much as Rhyme thinks Armageddon is nigh, he's still capey enough to plan for the future and gun for Puff's multiplatinum turf.



SPIRITUALIZED

TITLE...
*Live at the Albert
Hall*
LABEL...
Elektra/Arista

What you're missing Jason Pierce's simultaneous extremes of studio nerd-dom and righteous sprawl stretched out with heavenly concert cacophony.

Conclusion Psychedelic roots music for people who wouldn't dream of wearing a Phish T-shirt.



VARIOUS ARTISTS

TITLE...
*The Perfect
Beats...*
LABEL...
Tommy Boy

What you're missing An urban dance music unlike anything that had come before.

Conclusion This was a different New York—pre-AIDS, pre-supermodels, pre-Leo—when black, white, Euro, American, gay, straight, disco, rap, Latin, organic, and synthetic all had their moment on the floor.

(continued from page 120) up the sport in the '70s were growing older and giving it up. Making things worse, America slipped into a recession.

Skateboard sales dropped overnight. Stacy Peralta's signature board, which had once sold more than 5,000 units per month, was now selling only a few hundred. Jim Muir and Wes Humpston lost the Dogtown trademark to their business partners, who promptly went bankrupt.

"Things just blew up," says Alva of his own company at that time. "A lot of the money we'd made in the boom went into products that were short-lived—a full, glitzy fashion line, disco roller-skate boots. Just crazy, wack stuff." Sensing the end of skateboarding as a vocation, he dissolved his partnership with Zehnder and moved back in with his father for a while. Soon, he started taking dental technician courses at a local junior college.

In the most unfortunate incident to punctuate that era, Adams' good luck finally failed to coincide with his bad behavior. By 1982, he'd developed a taste for tequila and ruining other people's nights. One evening, he trashed Adams and some punk friends found a pair of gey men walking down the street to yell at. When the men yelled back, Adams started kicking one while a friend punched the other. In a few moments, both pedestrians lay face down on the concrete. Others at the scene soon joined in, kicking the two prone men with their steel-toed boots. By the time they were finished, one of the men was dead. Two days after the incident, Adams was arrested at his apartment and charged with murder, though he insisted he had left the scene by the time the others started kicking the men. He was ultimately convicted of assault, for which he served four months in jail.

"We were young and stupid," says Alva, alluding to that incident and his own episodes of alcohol-fueled violence. "There was shit that went down that I wish we had done differently."

"THEY WERE REVOLUTIONARY" When skateboarding's popularity began to rise again in the mid-'80s, thanks in large part to the trailblazing videos that Stacy Peralta created to promote Powell-Peralta, the Dogtowners were no longer the most technically accomplished skaters. A new wave of kids like Christian Hosoi and Rodney Mullen and Tony Hawk had surpassed them. In the years that have followed, very little about Dogtown has ever made it into any form more permanent than the occasional magazine article—there are Glen E. Friedman's books of photos, *Fuck You Heroes* and *Fuck You Too*, which include numerous photos of Alva, Adams, and other Dogtown skaters, and two chapters in Michael Brooke's recently released history of skateboarding, *The Concrete Wave*.

But if the history of Dogtown is largely forgotten today, its influence is inescapable. "They were revolutionary style-setters," says Kevin Thatcher, publisher of *Thrasher*. "I mean, snowboarding, rollerboarding, skysurfing, even surfing now—it all comes from what Jay and Tony were doing 20 years ago. So many people are trying to be hard-core now, but those guys didn't even have to try. It just came to them naturally."

Today, Jay Adams lives and surfs in Hawaii, where he keeps a vintage Zephyr-Flex fiberglass skateboard in the backseat of his car. On the back of his neck, in dark blue ink, a small tattoo reads 100% SKATEBOARDER 4 LIFE. And, despite his brush with dental technology, Tony Alva realized he could never work at a regular job. He resurrected his company in the mid-'80s and continues to produce his namesake boards. For the last 30 years, he's never gone more than a few days without skating some new drainage ditch or backyard pool or multimillion-dollar skatepark.

Which is what he's doing now at the Vans opening. Poised at the edge of the pool, he's watching the kid who dropped in on him, waiting for that flash of miscalculation. And, just before the kid loses it, just before gravity and failed nerve send his board in one direction and him in another, Alva, with a sixth sense developed over three decades of such opportunistic surveillance, drops and begins his run.

Two hours later, as Alva and his girlfriend exit the park's front entrance, they pass some minor disturbance. A group of kids are trying unsuccessfully to argue their way into the park. But Alva and his girlfriend are oblivious to the confrontation. They disappear into the crowd of shoppers, and don't even notice the three policemen responding to the scene.

"Well, what did they expect?" one of the cops is saying as they brush by Alva and his girlfriend. "Of course they're going to have problems. They put a skatepark in the middle of a mall." ■

For more on the history of skateboarding, log on to *SPINonline* for excerpts from Michael Brooke's book *The Concrete Wave*.

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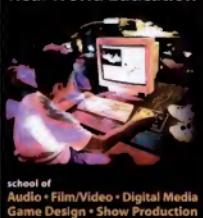
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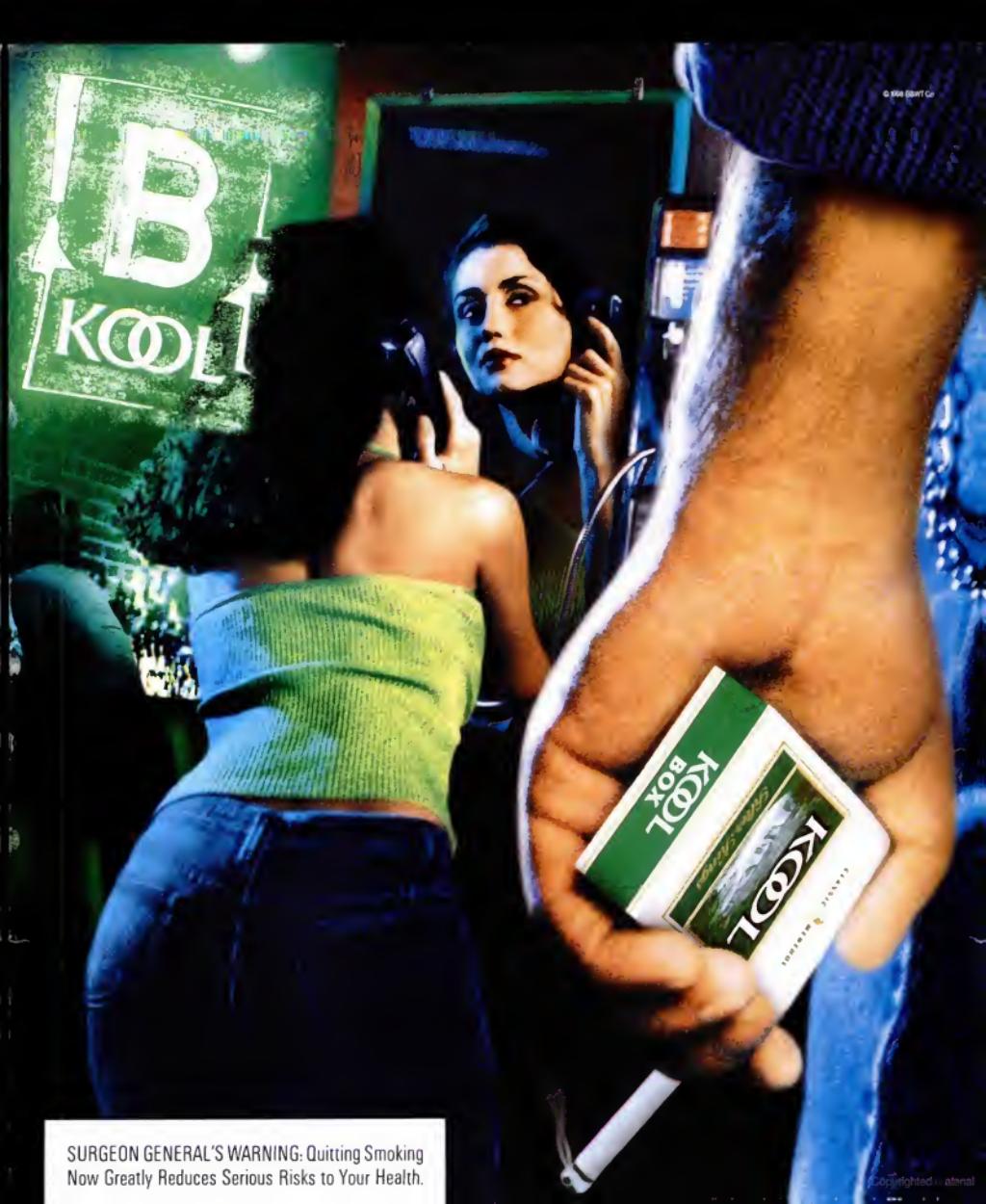
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PS. IF EVER YOU WANT A POET IN THE ROOM TO DESCRIBE YOUR ETHEREAL BEAUTY AND ENCHANTED LOVEMAKING I SHALL BE HAPPY TO OBLIGE EVEN IF THAT MEANS THAT I HAVE TO STAND PERFECTLY STILL.



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